INVISIBLE BOY

EVERYONE HAS THEIR SECRETS

BY TWOONY

1. Chapter 1
2. Chapter 2
3. Chapter 3
4. Chapter 4
5. Chapter 5
6. Chapter 6
7. Chapter 7
8. Chapter 8
9. Chapter 9
10. Chapter 10
11. Chapter 11
12. Chapter 12
13. Chapter 13
14. Chapter 14
15. Chapter 15
16. Chapter 16
17. Chapter 17
18. End
19. Christmas Special
20. Q&A
21. Fan Art

Chapter 1

Everyone has their secrets. Mine is just a bit more extreme than others.

I'm invisible.

"Where are the hell are you?!" The thug shouts while blindly thrashing his knife about in an act of desperation and horror.

I smirk before kicking his feet out from under him. The thief topples to the ground, limbs thrashing about appearing like a newborn deer.

"W-What the hell?!" The thug continues swinging his blade frantically in the darkened alley. Each movement is more hectic than the last. Blood trickles out of his bruised nose, courtesy of me, while his panicked eyes are attempting to take in their surroundings.

Cars are whizzing by on the streets, horns honk angrily at those that have probably been sitting for no more than a second, and the smell of back alley trash lingers in the air. The street light at the end of the alley flickers on as the sun is starting to set.

While I would happily continue messing with him, sirens are approaching. The girl he was trying to mug earlier has already run off. Judging by the lights and sounds, she called the cops too. There's no reason for me to stick around so, while the cops come running into the alley, I walk out without a care, unseen by all. Behind me the thug is shouting about, *"an invisible force, an alien I'm telling you, an alien,"* that the cops obviously don't care about.

Alien? Absolutely not. I'm a totally normal teenage boy! Well, I guess that's not true since most teenagers may feel invisible but that doesn't mean that they actually are. I, on the other hand, am both, in the metaphorical and physical sense.

With a triumphant bounce in my step, I traverse the usual route I take home, only re-appearing behind a dumpster that smells of rotten eggs and fish just before stepping onto the bus. There's some elderly lady with far too many bags sitting at the front, an obviously drunk office worker in the back ready to hurl, and some girls likely heading to a club huddled together in the seats. I choose to sit across from the little old lady, pressing my forehead to the cool glass of the moving bus. The brown curls of my hair clings to the glass when the bus lurches forward.

I've never met anyone like me, someone who can disappear and reappear in the blink of an eye. I guess I'm not totally average, but no one would see me as anything special otherwise. In school, I'm a nobody. I'm no popular sportsman with every guy and gal pining after me, ready to rip their clothes off from a single sultry look. I'm not even one of the nerds that get shoved into a locker. I'm, for lack of a better word, invisible, and that's ok seeing as people leave me be, but sometimes I wish for something more.

Sometimes I want more. Sometimes I want to be the cool kid that stands out in the crowd. Sometimes I want to be Mr. Popular with a hundred and one different friends and always something (or someone) to do. Sometimes I want to be anyone other than me. But that's normal, isn't it? We all have times where we wish to be something we aren't; either for the excitement or the chance to feel something new, or because deep down we know we're much more than what we currently are, or maybe we just hope that's the case.

The bus comes to a halt. Sadly, the drunk follows me in getting off. I grimace when he sways from side to side like a weed in the wind. Then he stumbles forward and face plants on the ground. I'd help but he's already up, looking back at me with a slightly bruised nose then moving down the sidewalk to who-the-hell-knows where. I'm not interested in finding out. Besides, Mom's probably mad I'm out so late.

Mom doesn't get how I feel. She never has, always spouting about how I'm already special, that I'm already unique, that we all are, and wishing to be someone else is only going to hurt us in the long run. I get her point, really, I do, but sometimes it just sucks.

"Hey, Micah!"

I hesitate in the unlocking of my front door, glancing to my left to find Leo Halton standing on his porch next door. His short blonde hair is damp and plastered to his forehead. Judging by the gear he's carrying, he's just gotten home from soccer practice. He gives me a smile; one that he'll give to anyone. He's just too nice not to acknowledge others. We're the same age, but he's the Mr. Popular I mentioned earlier, the one that stands out in a crowd, the one with a hundred and one friends, the one with always something to do, a somebody.

"You're home late," my neighbor says, sitting his belongings on the porch.

I hum in response, giving him a quick nod that he continues smiling at. I guess just to say hi? He's friendly like that, I suppose. Our conversation ends as quickly as it started with me walking inside without another word.

"Where have you been?" Mom asks after I walk through the door. She's standing in the kitchen with her hands on her hips, a stance that means a lecturing is on its way. Damn, haven't even taken my shoes off and I'm getting nagged. Is this a record?

"Walking home?" I reply.

"It doesn't take that long to walk home."

"Damn, I had to take a piss along the way, Mom."

Mom scowls, probably for my language and the fact that she knows I'm lying. Her green eyes, that we share, narrow on me as if to say, *"cut the crap."* She knows me too well. I don't know why I bother lying to her anymore. Second nature, I guess?

"No one saw me." I sigh when finally kicking off my shoes.

"It's not just about people seeing you, Micah."

Mom is following me up the stairs. I don't know why I bother trying to get away from her. Shutting my door doesn't help either because, like me, Mom has her own ability and that is...

She walks right through the door.

I huff and face her. "We agreed that you are not allowed to just waltz into my room. You have to knock and—"

Mom raises her hands in defense before I even finish, turns around to walk back out, only to knock then walk right back in. I flip her off for that, which earns me a smack to the head real quick. Unfair. I am a teen. I need my space! That's it, I'm sneaking into her room later and scaring the absolute crap out of here as revenge.

"This is serious, Micah. You are going to get yourself into real trouble one day. I don't want you jumping into situations where you can get hurt. I'm not saying that because I don't care about people, but sometimes just because you can do something doesn't mean that you should."

"Mom, it was one thug. He didn't even see me coming." I grin at my own joke that has Mom rolling her eyes. What? I thought it was funny.

"Micah—"

"I'm sorry, it won't happen again."

I say that every time and every time it's a lie. Mom knows this, it's why she always gives me a look, the look that says how much she wants me to stop, how much she needs me to. What's the point of our gifts though if we never use them? I've asked it before and never got a real answer. It changes all the time from something almost heroic sounding like, *"it's fate, one day you'll need it, Micah, and on that day you may use it,"* to something totally annoying like she said before, *"just because you can do something doesn't mean that you should."*

I don't understand how Mom doesn't feel the same. When I asked what she did in high school with her gift she always replied with, *"Nothing."* I almost want to call her out on her lie because it has to be a lie, right? Surely it is. She had to have moments, had to have times where she said, *"screw it,"* and did what she had to because it was right. I never say it though, never ask more because I know she'll say whatever she can to keep me safe and if that means lying to me then so be it.

"Clean yourself up and do your homework. Dinner will be done in a bit," says Mom, seeming to realize that there's no point arguing with a brick wall (that brick wall being me). She leaves with one final desperate look over her shoulder that I hope my smile will ease. It doesn't, and she leaves by walking through my door again. I'm not even going to point it out, whatever.

I do as I'm told and clean myself up by washing my hands then changing from my slightly sweaty clothes to comfortable sweats. I linger in the bathroom for a moment, my hand resting on my clothes that, when I will them to, disappear then reappear over and over like I expect it to suddenly stop. Sometimes I think it just might. One day I'll wake up and this power of mine will be gone. I'll wake up and realize, somehow, my whole life has been a dream, like one of those conspiracy theories saying we're all living in a video game or some shit, like the Matrix. But hopefully without the crazy robots trying to use everyone as batteries.

It sure feels unreal. Growing up with this so-called gift, but not being able to tell anyone has always been a pain. Mom couldn't let me start public school until I was eleven. I didn't have this power under control. I'd disappear at random so we couldn't risk it. Yet another thing that sparks the same question over and over; why? Why me?

While I'm doing my homework, I'm not really focusing on it. It's so hard on days like this, when I use my power for good my brain won't shut up. It's like every sense in my body is on high alert, it stays that way for some time and I'm not really sure why. Is it because I want to do more? Be some vigilante that runs around the streets like Batman but very gay and, sadly, not filthy rich? Who knows.

It just feels wrong, wrong to waste it, whatever this is. What I have, what I can do, it's in our genes. Mom says it's been in our family for centuries, further back than anyone can remember. Mom has it, my grandfather had it before her and his great uncle before him. Each gift is different and each one makes me want to ask why. Now I have it and none of us have ever really done anything with it, so what's the point? Where did it come from? Why did we get it? Are there others? What is my purpose? Why does no one else seem to care?

It almost feels like a test of will. How long will I last before I break? Because I can feel myself teetering on that edge. I can see the drop, see the dark fall, and that scares me.

~

Important Note: Hi, please do not refer to my characters as sex positions, "top" or "bottom." They are Micah and Leo, people with ever changing desires and interests. Please respect my request here and on my other stories, thank you.

This is a young adult story involves super hero shenanigans, a lot of sarcasm, scared teenagers in unfamiliar and scary situations, and just people being confused people. If that sounds like a story for you, give it a try ^^

Chapter 2

When I have a believable lie to give Mom, I run off after school to the abandoned buildings outside of town. Most come across as old warehouses that look like something out of a post-apocalyptic movie. The bus ride is short, often people stare at me oddly when I get off, likely thinking I'm some drugged up teen with far too much time on my hands and an already ruined future. I much rather they think that than know what I'm really doing.

It's sort of an experiment that I'm conducting, one about myself. I test myself, what I can do, for hours and hours until I feel I may just pass out (or actually pass out, but we need not discuss that.) Mom never cared about what she could do like I do, or anyone else for that matter. When I asked her if she ever tried passing through a person or a moving object, she always gave me this look, like she wondered why I asked. I don't get how she isn't curious because I want to know everything.

What can she do? What can I do? What is the extent of our powers? Is there more to them than meets the eye? Why does no one seem to care? Come on, we're like something out of a comic, all we're missing is a bad spandex suit! How can they not be curious? I've never understood.

The streets are pretty dead on this side of town. Cop cars aren't as frequent as one would think considering this place is perfect for shady business. I can't count the amount of times I've walked in on a drug deal or seen an impatient customer to a lady of the night crammed into an alley or a parked car. Even with the possibility of little to no people, I still do my best to hide before disappearing.

There's an old rusted fence around a two story warehouse. Do I know what it was used for? Definitely not, probably not a good thing either, but it's a great spot. The fence has some rips in it that I slide on through with ease, and always unseen. Then it's easy to hop in through one of the windows that was busted long ago and start scoping the place out to make sure no one else is there. It's easy and simple when no one can see you.

The first time I disappeared was when I was a baby, or so Mom said. She claimed she freaked for about thirty seconds before I reappeared in my crib and, after that, I sort of went on and off like a flickering light for days. Good thing dad was no longer around. Mom would have had a fun time explaining that to him.

It's funny to think about because, as I got older, as I learned to control it, I started to wonder, what can I do? How long can I stay invisible? How long can I keep other things unseen? What can I hide? Can I move these objects or do they have to be stationary? Can I make water disappear? What about a lit match? All these are questions that I've been trying to learn and, even if they don't work, can I practice it until it does?

The biggest object I have made vanish is a car. It took me days to finally learn and, even then, I blacked out after about 10 seconds. The strain was so much that my head was pounding for days and I couldn't even vanish myself let alone other objects. I haven't tried it again, but I have discovered another new trick.

The coast is clear and I get to work on the second floor. Natural light pours in from the dirtied windows. There's trash all over, from floating shopping bags to broken bottles. Wow, way to protect the environment, folks. I grab one of the water bottles and sit it a few feet in front of me then take a seat cross legged. My eyes focus on the bottle, looks like I'm Cyclops trying to force my laser eyes to work. All my concentration is on the empty bottle, which disappears a second later without my need to touch it. However, the moment I chuckle with delight it reappears and I'm left groaning at how easy it is for my concentration to break. Whatever, it's a start.

Normally I have to be touching the object to turn it invisible so the fact that I can do something like this for a second is already awesome. If Mom found out what I've been doing she would probably strangle me, but what she doesn't know won't hurt her. So says the currently un-strangled child.

I do this for hours, simply trying to push myself as hard as I can. Some nights I leave feeling impressed, others I'm just sad. It's not like I can share these achievements with anyone. I wish I could tell Mom. I wish I could tell someone but all these small successes have to be kept to myself. It sucks. Once again, I return home later that evening with probably more secrets than when I left.

"Welcome home, Sweetie," Mom shouts from the kitchen, appearing before me with a spot of flour on her cheek (that she seems to not know is there) and an apron covered in who knows what. "How was school? Have any fun?"

"Loads, Gary Mills forgot what tissues were for and was picking his nose in class. It was fascinating how far he stuck his finger up there."

Mom does not find me amusing. Pity. I think I'm loads of fun.

"I hope you and Harry weren't picking your noses this evening," Mom grumbles, seeming unpleased with my lack of a real response.

Harry is this annoying kid I tutor from time to time, at least I used to. When his mother spoke to mine about the tutoring I thought of the pro's and con's to murder (murdering Harry, of course,) but I got paid for the gig so it was kind of worth it. Honestly, he hasn't asked for help in months but he makes for a good excuse to run off and practice.

"Nah," I finally reply. "We were watching porn, typical teenager stuff."

Mom pinches the bridge of her nose. I hear her asking where I got my attitude from but we both know it's from her. There's no one else in this house I could have gotten it from.

"Oh, right!" I swear there's an actual light bulb above her head. "Micah, hurry and clean up. I invited the Haltons over for dinner!"

"Why?" I glance at the clock, finding that it's a quarter past eight. "And isn't it a little late for dinner?"

"Go, go, they'll be here in about twenty minutes!" She's pushing me off the couch before I can respond. I'm not sure what I'm meant to clean up, my clothes perhaps? I'm not changing into a suit or something because the neighbors are coming over, if that's what she's thinking.

After putting on a nicer shirt, some button down that I rarely wear, and 15 or so minutes pass, the front door opens. I recognize Mrs. Halton's voice followed by Leo's then his dad's. I roll my eyes. Great, small talk and uncomfortable discussions, my absolute favorite. It's not like I don't like the Halton's. I dislike everyone equally, but sometimes Mom likes to invite people over just because. There's no reason other than company and I do not share the same enthusiasm. It probably has to do with the lack of time she spent around others when I was little. Since I couldn't quite control myself back then she couldn't risk taking me outside as often as other kids. She couldn't invite people over a lot, it was always a risk.

I, on the other hand, learned to enjoy the peace that came with silence. Sometimes I wonder if my gift somehow stemmed off my personality before it was even formed. I was given invisibility because I'm good at being invisible? It's an interesting thought.

Walking down the steps, I find Leo and his parents are already in the dining room. Mom is waving for me to come in, which I do, and give a soft hello to the familiar faces. As usual, Leo gives his signature beaming smile. Mom always complains about how the two of us aren't close, especially since we live right next door. "But he's so sweet," she always says to me, like Leo isn't sweet to every single person he meets. That's just how he is. We're not special because he smiles at us or acts all prim and proper. He is prim and proper with everyone, that's all there is to it.

"Leo, tell me, how's soccer going? After winning Nationals last year, I bet you've all been busy," Mom says quickly after dinner begins. I'm munching on my food silently, pretending I don't exist, which is quite easy.

"Coach has been hounding us even worse than usual, says he doesn't want us getting cocky."

"Ah, that's what happens sometimes," Mr. Halton says with a nod. He gestures to Leo, his smile mirroring his son's, obvious where Leo got it from. "Some people think they don't have to try as hard after they've obtained something. Coach Markin knows what he's doing."

And I tune out the rest of the conversation real quick. I don't play sports nor do I understand...any of them actually. Teamwork, sweat, activity, competitive nature's sucking the joy out of a fun activity, something to do with balls and scoring points, never been my strong suit. I'm more of a video games in the dark corner of my room kind of guy, which is exactly what I excused myself to do after finishing my food.

The Halton's will be here for a while longer. Mom typically speaks with them about who knows what for at least an hour. Normally Leo remains downstairs with them, but when I try to make my escape, he asks, "Mind if I join you?"

I stare into a pair of deep blue eyes that immediately cause me discomfort. I'm tempted to say no, simply because I know there is nothing in my room Leo would find enjoyable. Sadly, Mom has heard and is quick to reply for me, "Of course you can, Leo! Why don't the two of you play some games? I'm sure Micah has something upstairs that you two can do."

I'm going to kill her and dispose of her carcass in a tub of battery acid.

Leo beams like a lighthouse on a stormy night. It physically hurts to look at. Please, someone tell this kid to stop taking care of his teeth. Seems no is not an option though. Free will apparently isn't either, thanks Mom.

Waving my hand, I give in and allow Leo to follow me up the stairs. We're silent until I reach my room, where I clear my throat and ask, "Is there a reason you wanted to come with me? Normally you stay downstairs to talk."

Leo's eyes widen in shock at my having asked. I'm not sure why I wouldn't since, like I said, he typically would stay downstairs. The first thing that comes to mind is, perhaps he fought with his parents? I don't know what about since his parents are nothing but proud of him. I bet when he shits they call it gold.

"Just thought we could hang out since we never really do," Leo responds like that's somehow an answer. Is it weird that we don't hang out? Apparently Mom and Leo think so while I don't see why we would. He's an avid sportsman. I'm an avid gamer. He's Mr. Popular and I'm Mr. Invisible. We may go to the same school, but we have a different circle of friends, different interests, and I've never really considered him someone of my interest. Why would we hang out? Simply because we're neighbors? Yeah, I'm neighbors with that old batshit crazy lady next door with a million cats but we sure as hell ain't friends.

My expression of confusion or disgust (I don't know, I can't see myself) must be more obvious than I thought because it causes Leo to frown. The look honestly does not suit him.

"If it bothers you that much, I can go back downstairs," he suggests.

"Not that it bothers me. It's just weird."

"You certainly don't hold back, do you?"

I shrug and head over to my TV so I can start digging through the games. I'm not sure what he wants to play, what he might be into other than soccer. I think he played basketball back in the day? I don't have any games like that though so I'm left sitting there scratching my head.

"What games do you normally play?" I ask, throwing a glance over my shoulder. Leo is sitting in one of the beanbags on my floor. It's a little strange to see him sitting so relaxed. Every time I see him his head is held high, back straight and shoulders broad that I almost don't recognize him sitting like one of us normals. I think that like I'm normal. Funny.

"You can put whatever you want in. I don't mind watching," Leo answers with a shrug. "Seems you have a lot of games, what's your favorite?"

"Are we playing twenty questions or something?"

"If you want."

"Not really."

I slip God of War in because I've already beaten it. With Leo around, I don't want to play something I have to focus on. I head over to sit in the beanbag chair next to Leo, who doesn't seem to know how to respond to my quick conversation ender. I really

didn't mean to, it's just I honestly don't want to sit around asking what our favorite colors are. I'm not the best at small talk, or conversation in general, especially not with someone I consider to be a stranger. I struggle making conversation with friends so this is a whole other ball game. I'm still confused as to why Leo is with me. He's going to be bored, watching me play a game that he probably isn't interested in. It makes me feel guilty, like I'm supposed to entertain him somehow. I don't entertain. Not my thing.

"Congratulations, by the way," I blurt out in hopes to cut through the arctic tundra that has formed between us. Leo jerks his head up to stare at me in blinking confusion.

"Nationals," I clarify. It was some time ago but I never "properly" congratulated him.

For whatever reason, Leo smiles, showing off the deep dimples in his cheeks that I never noticed he had before. We've never really been this close and I'm starting to notice that there is a small hint of brown in his blonde hair.

"Thanks!" Leo chuckles, elbowing me playfully, but he either doesn't realize his own strength, or I'm that much of a weakling, because I nearly topple out of the bag. Leo grabs my arm, quickly holding me in place before I brush him off. He laughs. "You should come to a game sometime."

"A game?"

"Well, practice. We're having some practice games to keep us in shape or whatever. You should come watch them sometimes."

"I don't know dick about soccer or sports."

"You don't have to in order to watch," says Leo, nodding as if that'll somehow prove his point. "It's always funny to watch a guy get kicked between the legs, as long as it isn't you."

I roll my eyes but feel my lips twitch back into a smile. "I'll think about it."

"Cool." Leo hums, burying himself into his new seat. "Cool."

And, honestly, we're pretty quiet afterwards. From time to time Leo comments and I'm surprised to learn he has played all the God of War games, including this one. It makes me feel less guilty about putting it in because, somehow, it seems we do have something in common. That's nice to know, I guess? I'm not really sure. This whole situation baffles me.

Nearly two hours later, Mom comes up to announce that Leo's parents left an hour ago but didn't want to bother us since we seemed to be having fun. At least they assumed that since neither of us have bothered them. Leo says a quick goodbye, looking at me before he leaves in order to ask, "You'll really think about coming to watch a game, right?"

I'm surprised he has brought it up again. It's an odd request and, honestly, I thought it was a joke that he would forget about in a second. Ok, so I hoped he would forget about it in a second. However, that doesn't seem to be the case so, with a nervous nod, I answer, "Yeah, I'll think about it."

"Cool, cool," he says again, nodding while backing up towards the door. I chuckle when he stumbles over the door frame, nearly face planting, but catching himself on the door. Those sportsman reflexes are coming in handy it seems. Leo doesn't look at me when he says goodbye, but instead, bolts down the stairs and out the front door. I don't even have time to answer him, my hand waving in the air at absolutely nothing.

Well, this has been a weird evening, hasn't it? I shrug it off and return to my game, considering Leo's request for all of a second before deciding no way in hell. I won't know anyone there. It'll be boring. Why does he even want me to go? It's just...weird.

~

Another update, yahoo! So Micah likes to test his abilities, is that a good or a bad thing? What do you think of him so far? What is going to happen next? :)

Chapter 3

"Help me."

"No."

"Micah, please." Beckett is tugging on my shirt sleeve, bottom lip jutted out and brown eyes wide. "I'm shit at math."

"You're shit at everything."

Beckett scowls at my teasing.

"Ask your girlfriend for help." I point to Misty across the cafeteria. She's talking to some of her friends in the lunch line. As if she heard me, she glances back, sends Beckett a smile followed by a quick wave, that he enthusiastically returns, and turns back to her friends.

"She's not even in our class. She has her own homework and we both gotta work on this!" Beckett seems to think that will convince me but he should know better.

"No."

"Micah!"

"Beckett."

I take a bite of my pizza, staring at him while chewing with my mouth open. I can see his eye twitching followed by his lips twisting into a grimace. He hates it when people chew with their mouths open and, well, I love to annoy people. Eventually, he presses his hand to my chin, pushes it up then says, "I won't ask again so, please, stop doing that."

I salute him and do as I'm...requested? Told? Whatever. While Beckett is grumbling to himself about terrible friends, I'm trying to decide on what lie to give Mom so I can head off and practice some more after school. I haven't been able to get much in for about a week. There hasn't been any trouble on the walks home either so my evenings have been dead. It's actually leaving me a little jumpy. Oh no, I think I have become an adrenaline junky.

"You know what, I get why you're so pissy lately," Beckett says out of the blue, poking me in the chest until I send him a glare that he squeaks at. After a moment of him realizing I am not going to kill him, he clears his throat so he may explain, "It's because you don't have a boyfriend."

"One, I haven't been pissy lately. I'm always pissy."

Beckett snorts. "True, true."

"I'll let that slide."

"Cool, thanks, dude."

"Two, it has nothing to do with not having a boyfriend. It's just my personality." I start to chew with my mouth open again until Beckett gags.

"Whatever, whether it's the reason or not, get a boyfriend. You make me sad just looking at you!" Beckett exclaims, glancing about the cafeteria like he's trying to recruit a boyfriend for me. "Come on, there has to be someone here you fancy—"

"No one says fancy." I'm ignored. He'll regret that later.

"You haven't dated since Felix and, well, he was a walking, talking piece of actual shit."

I would argue, but it's true so I nod and finish my meal. Beckett looks to me like he expects me to say more, maybe verbally agree or admit to "fancying" someone. When he gets none of that and, instead, is given a confused look, he scowls. What? Did he expect a reaction from me? That's asking too much.

"Micah, has anyone ever told you that your emotional capacity is borderline nonexistent?"

"Yes, but never phrased like that before. You used some big words in there. Does your head hurt? You need to go see the nurse?"

Beckett slams his foot into mine beneath the table. I grunt, biting my bottom lip while giving him another glare that he actually ignores this time.

"I'm just worried that because Felix was a cheating bastard that you won't try to date again."

"No need to worry about that. I'll date when I want." I shrug, not sure what else to say, or if there is anything else. I'm not hung up on Felix. Yeah, it still hurts to think my first

dating experience ended after discovering he cheated on me with every guy he could within a 10 mile radius. Then I panicked and Mom panicked and I got myself tested out of pure fear, but it's not like that has put me off from dating. At some point I would like to date again, just not now.

I don't need more time, I just know it isn't the right time. There's no one I like and there's been no urge to find that someone. When it happens, it'll happen. I'm not gonna go out of my way to "find love," or whatever. I've got time, it's no big deal. Beckett's just in a lovey-dovey mood because he finally got with Misty after fawning over her for a year. It's been disgusting to watch, honestly. When I voice those thoughts, Beckett smacks me for it but we both know it's true.

"Why are you physically assaulting Micah?" Misty asks after taking a seat with her food. Beckett is a love sick puppy instantly, moving from sitting next to me to next to her while pressing a long kiss to her cheek causing me to gag.

"He's being annoying," Beckett answers.

"I'm being great," I correct him.

Misty shakes her head at the both of us, red curls dancing around her round face before choosing to discard our conversation for a new one, "Did you guys see the news this morning?"

"That's hilarious, you thinking we watch the news," Beckett answers with a shake of his head. It's hard enough for that boy to keep his attention on an action packed movie let alone a boring news show.

"You really should watch it. There's been a lot of talk of crimes lately in our area, especially on your way home, Micah."

Yes, I am very aware of that. I deal with some of them daily.

Beckett reaches across the table to tickle my chin with a wide grin, "Like anyone would mess with this hellspawn. They'd probably feel the heat of hell itself seeping from his pores."

"You're about to feel fire from hell itself if you keep touching me."

Beckett looks at me with sad eyes, exaggerating his pain by throwing his hand over his forehead, damsel in the distress style. "Why do you hate me so much?"

"Comes naturally."

With a pout, Beckett leans again Misty mumbling something about being abused by his husband. I roll his eyes. Misty's lips are pursed. She seems truly bothered that we aren't clued in, even more so when she tacks on, "There are gangs popping up around town, turf wars—"

"The usual," I hum, because it's true. We've always had issues with crime. It's a big city with a lot of people and, sadly, some (I'd argue most) of them are major idiots.

"My point is, you two need to know what areas to avoid. I don't want either of you getting jumped after school, or worse."

"You're so sweet, babe." Beckett pinches Misty's cheek. She slaps his hand away but smiles when she takes a bite of her pizza. I suppose I can't blame her for being concerned and I appreciate the sentiment, but not really something I have to worry about. Her words are soon forgotten then pushed completely to the back of our minds by the time lunch ends.

The bell rings, signaling it's time to move to our next class. Misty leaves us, waving goodbye after Beckett gets a few quick kisses in that I will hit him for later. Seriously, this gross couple. Spare me! On our way to class though, we're stopped by a sudden fight in the halls. Shouldn't be surprising, it's high school and nowhere is as dangerous as the crowded halls of high school. The two of us wait, not so much troubled as we are surprised, to find what appears to be an underclassman on the ground.

Rolland, one of the resident jackasses, is sneering at the poor kid with his sniveling goons right behind. Beckett is quick to tug on my shirt sleeve, requesting we take another path. Most kids are already doing that, moving around Rolland and his friends so as to not get involved. If there weren't so many people I'd give Rolland a good scare , but it's fine, there's another hero to save the day.

"Why am I not surprised to find you in the center of this mess, Rolland?" Leo asks, walking into the clearing and holding out his hand for the underclassman. The moment the boy sees it, he smiles and takes Leo's hand, cowering behind the guy that makes everyone, including Rolland, seem small.

"Always playing the hero, Halton."

"I'm surprised you don't call me Leo, should be easier to remember for an idiot like you."

The audience snickers, Beckett included. He nudges me once or twice too, mouthing something about Leo that I don't really care about. This isn't an unusual occurrence. Leo is Mr. Popular, and one of those popular guys who deserves it. He definitely doesn't let Rolland, or any other jerks in school, get away with anything, especially if he's around. I guess Leo's pretty cool sometimes.

"Keep talking big. One of these days you won't have the teachers around to protect you and I'll teach you a lesson for always butting it," Rolland threatens, at least he tries to.

"You know where I live, Rolland. You can pay me a visit anytime."

And just like that, Leo has shot Rolland down for the millionth time. All he does is scoff and storm off, bumping shoulders with me when he walks by. Rude, I wasn't even involved! His goons follow, each one giving Leo a glare, but seeing as his soccer pals are coming down the hall, no one really does anything. It'd be an all out brawl, although that could be fun to watch, not even gonna lie.

"Aw, no one died," Beckett says with a frown that I roll my eyes at. He pats my shoulder. "Come on, let's get to class before the bell rings."

I'm about to agree except a familiar voice calls out to me, "Micah!"

Both Beckett and I turn to Leo, who is making his way over to us. It seems the younger kid is gone, probably ran off the moment he knew he was safe. Now, Leo has his focus on us, or rather, me.

"I was hoping I'd find you!" Leo exclaims, earning himself a cocked brow from me. Beckett is grinning and I know exactly what he's going to say once Leo is out of hearing range.

"Why?" I ask, giving Leo a once over. He has an odd bounce in his step. What? Did he save some kittens on the way here? Maybe get nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize? I wouldn't be surprised.

Leo digs through his backpack, pulling out a paper that he hands to me. "Here." I take the paper to read over, recognizing it immediately yet he still explains, "Those are our practice games that are coming up. If you can make it to one, let me know, ok?"

Wow, he really was serious. And by wow I mean, damn it, he actually wants me to go to one of his games. I guess that makes sense since he brought it up twice but he hasn't mentioned it since then. Still, I am confused as to why he wants me to tag along and I would ask but the bell signaling we should be in class goes off. Leo ruffles my hair for

some reason, says goodbye with his signature charming smile and darts off to class, allowing Beckett to open his absolutely worthless gobsmacker.

"I shouldn't assume, but damn, it seems like he might fancy you."

I punch Beckett square in the chest. He grunts, yelling after me when I choose to ignore his crazy statement and walk away. Unfortunately for me, we share our next class so he catches up quick.

"Come on, Mr. Popular hoped to see you. He wants you to come to his games. Hey, when did you two get so chummy anyways? Have a secret make out session and didn't tell me?" Beckett's eyes go wide. He pulls a Home Alone face, hands against his cheeks and everything. "Oh my god, did you two have hot drunk sex like in all those cheesy BL web novels?"

"How do you know about those so-called cheesy BL web novels?"

"Some are pretty good."

"You're straight."

"Aren't we all just a little gay though?" Beckett holds up his hand to pinch his fingers together while he grins. "Cause, honestly, have you seen Ryan Reynolds? How about Jason Momoa? Oh, the Hemsworths!"

I pinch the bridge of my nose. "I wish you were dead."

"Yeah, same."

I would punch him again but we've made it to class. We get a quick scolding about our tardiness before we're sent to our seats. Once there, I do slap Beckett's hand causing him to do the same and this continues for at least thirty seconds. During class he tries to text me then attempts to write a few notes, asking if I'm going to go to one of Leo's games. All of them are ignored until he finally tries to write the freaking question on my arm with a sharpie. Said sharpie is gonna get shoved up his ass if he don't quit!

I flip him off and quickly text him a simple, *no*.

Beckett does not seem pleased , but after a period or two of him trying to persuade me, he gives up. We both know that there is no force on earth or heaven than can change my mind—

"You're going."

Other than my mother, apparently.

"What?" I hiss, holding out my hand for the schedule that she stole from my bag. She's a snoop! I can't believe she dug in my bag. Ok, so the schedule was kind of hanging out of the top for the world to see, but still, it was in my bag. She shouldn't have touched it!

"Leo wants you to go and I don't see why you shouldn't." Mom looks over the schedule, probably trying to determine which match I can attend.

"I shouldn't because I hate sports and I'll be bored out of my mind," I explain, trying to chase Mom around the table but to no avail. "Besides, why does he suddenly want to hang out? Normally we say hi at school or talk for a second outside but that's it."

"And it's sad that there's no more than that," Mom argues, placing her hand on her hip in that lecturing fashion. I'm not in the mood for a lecture but here we go. "You're the same age. You go to the same school, live next door and he's so sweet. If he wants to hang out then—"

"It's probably out of pity."

"Micah!"

"What other reason is there?" I throw my hands in the air, swinging them around for a moment before dropping them to my side. "I'm not going, Mom. It's no big deal."

"You don't know that. What if it is? You claim that it's strange he asked then isn't it strange to think it isn't a big deal because he asked?"

I hate when she tries to twist things on me, especially when thinking about it kind of makes sense. Seems she knows I'm realizing that too, judging by her smile. She even wags her finger at me while holding out the schedule for me to take.

"One match, Micah, go and watch. I'm sure you'll have fun and, maybe, Leo won't ask for something else after."

"I can hope."

I'm whacked over the head for that too, which has me eyeing Mom like she's crazy. Why does she always hit me? I definitely didn't deserve that one! I say nothing of it though since I know she will happily smack me again. This is child abuse!

Since that conversation is obviously over, I head upstairs where I shut and lock my door. Why? I do not know. Mom will walk right in if she wants but it's not like I'm doing anything wrong. I'm just going to practice some more. I haven't come up with an excuse to run around town, not that she would really say no, but she'd probably suspect something.

Choosing to keep my back facing the door, I try to concentrate on a small object. This time it's a science book. I sit it on my desk, making sure none of my body is touching it or the desk for that matter. Mom is downstairs watching TV, I can hear it. The AC is on, it's rattling from the upstairs window. Cars are driving by on the street outside. A cat is meowing outside then...

Nothing.

It's quiet. Every noise is gone. There's nothing; nothing but the sound of my own breathing as I keep my gaze on the book that sits idly. It is sitting there, completely still until it flickers, much like Mom told me I once did. Like a dying light, it disappears, reappears and repeats until it finally vanishes completely.

I try not to smile but it doesn't work, however, this time it remains hidden. The world is slowly returning to my senses, the noise of the TV, the AC, the cars, the cat, and the book remains unseen. I hold it like that, watching the time tick away and wondering how it can go by so fast without me even realizing it.

But my head is starting to pound. My eyes are tiring, like I've been staring for hours without blinking at a fuzzy TV screen, although I obviously have been doing no such thing. After a heavy sigh, the book reappears and there's this sharp pain in the back of my neck. I feel like I need to crack it, but no matter how hard I try, it won't crack. Regardless of my headache, regardless of the pain in my neck, I'm left feeling exhilarated.

I did it. I wasn't even touching the book and it disappeared for—I look to my clock—an hour and fifteen minutes. It's a record!

The longest I've vanished myself for is 17 hours and, if I could, I would try for longer but that weekend was tough enough. I told Mom I was hanging out at Beckett's. In reality, I was roaming the streets completely unseen. I wonder if I could have lasted longer if I slept more the day before? After 17 hours, I just felt like I needed the longest nap of a lifetime.

Still, keeping an object I wasn't even touching completely invisible for over an hour, it's a first. I guess it's true, practice really does make perfect.

~

Already on to chapter 3, I'm on a roll! I'm just kinda posting as I go lol Anyways, we learned a bit about Micah's past relationships! Poor guy, he got cheated on, do you think it bothers Micah more than he lets on? Why is Leo so insistent on Micah coming to see a match?

Chapter 4

Might as well get this out of the way.

Knocking on Leo's door, I wait patiently for one of the Halton's to answer. It's his dad that's the first to greet me with a smile. That's it; the smiling is hereditary.

"Micah, hey bud, what's up?"

"Is Leo home?" I ask, although I saw him return home about twenty minutes earlier. I've just been avoiding this until Mom asked if I have talked with him yet. I tried asking why I need to tell him which game I'm going to, but then she gave me The Look. I rather not risk a lecturing so here I am.

"Yeah, he's in his room, come on in."

Mr. Halton steps aside. I do as I'm told then kick off my shoes before heading up the steps to Leo's room. His dad calls up, announcing my arrival before I even make it to his door, which flings open so fast, that Leo almost smashes in his own face like a pancake.

"Micah!" Leo stares down at me with wide eyes, standing in his doorway with nothing but a pair of sweats on. I give him a wave, which seems to bother him, I think, judging by the way he's trying to close his door like he's shielding himself. "Uh, what are you doing here?"

"The match." I hold up the schedule. "I was told to let you know I can make it to the one on Friday."

I don't have his number so talking to him is the only option. While he probably has every social media ever, I do not. I might have a twitter but Beckett is probably the only one that knows what it is since he made it. I'm not social in real life, why would I be social online? The most I do is get a little (very) sassy during video games.

Leo's eyes brighten considerably at the mention of the match. While he doesn't open the door, he does lean against it while smiling. "You'll come on Friday?"

"Yeah, that's...what I said."

Leo suddenly frowns. Running his hand through his hair, he shyly looks away then back to me then away again. This repeats for maybe another thirty seconds until he says, "Um...you know, if you really don't want to go you don't have to. I'm sorry if—if you feel obligated to go. I didn't mean to do that."

Well, technically, it's my mom that's forcing me to go so it's not like he made me feel obligated. I am about to voice this until I see Leo staring at the floor like he's just been sucker punched in the gut. His teeth are out to bite at his bottom lip while his fingers are tapping impatiently against his door. It's an odd look for him, one that makes me feel like an ass, which usually I try to do. In this instance, I'm not trying to be so I'm not ok with the feeling. He asked me to come to the match for a reason. I don't know what that reason is but...it must mean something to him if he asked, right?

"Don't worry about it," I blurt out, shrugging my shoulders as I do. "I don't mind going, it'll be...fun."

I'm not so sure about that, but when Leo's cheeks start to take on a light shade of pink I am suddenly excited about the idea of the game. I start to ask myself if I'm hallucinating, he's not actually blushing, right? I glance around the hall for some sign that he isn't. I don't know what that sign would be, but I don't get it because, when I look back at him, it's still there.

He's definitely blushing.

Why? Because I'm going to his match? Beckett would say it's because he fancies me. Part of me is thinking that way as well because I sure as hell don't blush at the idea of a guy hanging out with me unless I'm interested. Except Leo is straight, at least I think he is.

"Cool, uh, do you want to come in for a bit?" Leo asks, gesturing behind him. I'd say no, but Mom might kill me if she finds out all I did was inform Leo of my attendance. Besides, his behavior makes me curious. Apparently curiosity is my kryptonite.

Nodding, I follow Leo into his room, which is far different than my own. While mine is filled with games and covered with posters of my favorite movies or games, Leo's is exactly what someone would expect. Sports, sports, and more sports, action shots of snowboarders or surfers accompanied by pictures of him with friends all around his desk. I do see some video games, but not as many as my own.

Leo grabs a shirt, quickly throwing it on before taking a seat on the bed. His cheeks have returned to their natural tone but he won't look at me, which has me asking myself why. I've said it before and I'll say it again, we aren't that close so it's hard to believe

that, if he is at least bisexual, why would he crush on me? He's got to just be nervous or something.

"I don't have as many game options as you. I've got a few others downloaded," Leo says, gesturing to the games I was eyeing earlier. "Probably not a lot that are your taste either."

"We don't have to play a game."

"Then what do you want to do? Shoot some hoops?"

I roll my eyes. "Definitely not."

"What else do you like to do then, other than play games?"

"Watch movies, read, eat."

Leo laughs, nodding his head after the last one. "That's a great hobby."

"And you? Other than torturing yourself, what do you like?" I take a seat in his desk chair, pushing myself back and forth.

"I guess I just like torturing myself," Leo replies while crossing his arms. "Soccer, rock climbing, swimming, running, anything like that. You don't like any of it, not even for fun?"

"I don't mind exercise, sports are what's not really my thing. Once people get overly competitive, it just kills the game. Swimming is fun, I'd like to try bungee jumping, skydiving maybe."

"That would be awesome!" Leo announces, squirming a bit in his seat at the mention of it. "I've always wanted to go bungee jumping, oh, and scuba diving!"

"I'd just like to see a beach."

"You've never been?" Leo asks, sounding surprised. I know he and his parents have gone on vacation before. I think Mom mentioned once that they went to the beach one summer. Mom and I have gone to an amusement park or a nice hotel but that's it.

"Nope."

"We're going this summer, maybe you can tag along?" Leo suggests and, honestly, I wanna say yes. I've never been to the beach. I want to at least know the annoying feeling

of finding sand on me for days. I'm naturally frustrated so the feeling is normal, it'll be fine.

However, I'm once again reminded of this peculiar situation. Leo suddenly wanting to spend more time together, what's up with that? There's the fact that we're seniors, we'll be graduating at the end of the year, but even that seems odd. Why try to get closer now? Last I heard he's going to college nearby and doesn't plan to move into the dorms. I should ask, but that's equally as weird.

I opt to shrug and give a "maybe" that ends our conversation, something I excel at. Rather than sitting here awkwardly, I announce that I'll be at his game Friday and head home after he responds with a smile and quick wave goodbye. He looks disappointed to see me go and I feel like a bit of a jerk for it. He invited me to come in and I stayed for—what—five minutes? If that? But there wasn't much more to say. Wow, even I'm starting to think I need to work on my lack of basic communication with the rest of the human race. I am getting to be downright ridiculous.

"How'd it go?" Mom asks when I walk in the door. She's excited, like she expects to hear some grand news. I easily disappoint her.

"Fine."

"Just fine?" Mom scowls. "You're so socially inept."

"I could be a playboy that goes around gettin' bitches and doin' drugs," I say in my poor attempt of a dumb playboy accent. I don't even know what it is meant to sound like but it's bad enough that Mom grimaces.

"Yeah, I suppose you could be worse."

"Love you too, Mom."

With that, I am left to my own devices. Beckett wishes to know about my plans Friday, apparently he wants to tag along. I'm all for that because, if he doesn't go, I'll be bored. Well, even if he goes I'll be bored, but sometimes his stupidity can be amusing. Beckett tries to get more information out of me, like asking if Leo and I talked more. I lie and exclude what happened afterwards, making Beckett believe that I went over and left immediately afterwards. Technically, it's not a total lie since I didn't spend a lot of time there, but I have no desire to explain Leo's odd behavior.

I already know what Beckett is going to say. He's going to go with the crazy theory that Leo is crushing on me, the neighbor that he barely knows. Sure, people can get

infatuated or interested with someone just by looking at them, but Leo is Mr. Popular. He can get whoever he wants, even if he's not straight, he can definitely get someone better than me. Not to say I'm a bad catch but I'm no Leo, that's for sure. He has way more options, options that he has more contact with so there's obviously something else behind it. Maybe his parents are like my own? Forcing him behind closed doors to spend more time with me. I don't know why, but it makes more sense than the crush theory. Beckett would argue against that but Beckett is an idiot.

Whatever, it's not all that important.

My week goes by relatively quickly thanks to the abundance of jerks I meet after school. Perhaps I really am an adrenaline junky that enjoys the idea of being some kind of vigilante, I don't really know. However, nothing beats the look on someone's face when the purse in their hand is suddenly ripped away or they "trip over thin air." There's always confusion followed by panic then pure fear after I give them a quick kick or punch and that's the end of that.

If Mom caught me in the act of any of this she may drop dead of a heart attack. I suppose that's understandable since, once or twice, I've caught a glimpse of a gun beneath someone's hoodie. Those times I have backed off because the last thing I want is someone firing off a gun in every direction. Who knows what, or who, they might hit so I understand the worry. Still, it feels good to be helpful even if no one knows that it's me.

Friday gets here in the blink of an eye. The match is a home game, which is why I can make it. Beckett is excited about it, go figure. He is the type to go to games just to show some school spirit. I don't know how or why we became friends but I regret it everyday. Misty obviously tags along, but I did warn them if they start getting all cutesy around me, I will barf and it will be on them. Misty's face tells me that Beckett won't get so much as a kiss. Mission successful!

None of us are surprised to see that there aren't a crazy amount of people. These are practice matches, right? Leo said something along those lines. Normally the soccer games are a big deal at our school since we have a successful, and therefore popular, team. The practice matches don't matter so I guess no one cares? That sounds harsh, but it must be true judging by the smaller crowd than usual.

However, it makes it all the easier for Leo to find me. When he does, he waves enthusiastically from the field. For a second, I think I'm seeing things and he's waving at someone else. I turn around to check. Nope, no one is acknowledging him. I turn back, point to myself in questioning then watch him nod before beckoning me to come down.

"I told you," Beckett whispers to Misty, who giggles until I give them both a glare. Beckett smiles teasingly while Misty pretends like he said nothing. I don't know what he means by "I told you," but I'm assuming he told her about how he thinks Leo fancies me.

I'm going to punch them both, or maybe I'll just hit Beckett twice.

Sighing, I get up from the bench and walk down to the field. Leo is leaning against the fence, looking like a model out of a sports magazine in the green and white uniform.

"You made it," he says when I'm close.

"Yep."

Leo's hair is already slightly damp from sweat. His skin has a sheen to it and, somehow, he looks brighter than usual. It's almost scary. Sportsmen are terrifying people, truly. I respect them, but they scare me.

"Um, are you...hanging out with Beckett and Misty afterwards?" Leo asks, his voice somehow growing softer with each word until it's hard to hear.

"Don't know, depends on how much they piss me off."

Leo must find my answer humorous because he laughs, shaking his head afterwards. For a second, he seems at a loss of what to do. He glances at me, towards Beckett on the bleachers then at his own feet. Said feet are starting to kick at the dirt beneath him and I'm not entirely sure what I'm meant to do, ask what he's doing, walk away, crack a joke, I don't know so I wait.

I wait until Leo takes a deep breath and looks at me in order to ask in a shaking voice, "If you don't mind, after...after the game, could you stick around? I'll hit the showers and maybe we can grab something to eat, my treat?"

"I'd have to ask Beckett and Misty first." I gesture back to the two, which has Leo biting his lip. Again, he hesitates to speak.

"No, I mean, just the two of us."

Excuse me? Did I hear him right? I rub my right ear just in case, but nope, seems I am hearing fine, which means Leo just asked if we could grab something to eat, just the two of us. Ok, I admit I can be a bit oblivious to things at times, but I don't think this is one of those times.

Leo blushing, his voice shaking, suddenly wanting to hang out more, the two of us going out, those are clear signs of interest, right? I mean, if a guy that I knew wasn't straight was asking me all this I would immediately think he likes me. Leo is only different because I have no proof that he could be interested in guys, but the face he's making right now, the one where he's staring at me nervously, his teeth coming out to bite at his bottom lip, the very light blush on his cheek, those are obvious signs and—

I don't know how I feel about it.

"Halton!"

The both of us jump, Leo glancing back to his coach that's gesturing for him to come over. The match is about to begin.

Quickly, Leo looks at me and says, "If you stick around, I'll assume that's a yes."

He runs off before I can respond, leaving me standing here very much confused. Well, this has certainly turned out differently than I expected.

Once back at the bleachers Beckett tries (and fails) to talk to me about what Leo said. When all he gets is silence, he pouts and returns his attention to Misty. The two are chattering away while watching the game. Misty is like Beckett, they both enjoy showing some school spirit so they are nothing but enthusiastic while I'm...just not. Enthusiasm is not in my playbook, or rather, it's very rare.

My eyes are glued on Leo most of the match for a number of reasons. The first being that I am still baffled by his request. The two of us hanging out alone? Now that is something someone should get recorded. It is going to be hilariously awkward. Post it on YouTube for some of that second hand embarrassment cringe compilations. I'm not sure what Leo expects, but I'm leaning towards top tier catastrophe.

Second, I don't understand soccer. You kick a ball around and try to score but either miss or get blocked the majority of the time. At the moment, the teams are tied two to two, and the game is reaching its end, I think. I'm not sure about the plays or fouls or any of that so I don't care all that much about the others.

Third, and lastly, he looks damn good. Coming to the game and being confused out of my mind is somewhat worth it just to get this picturesque view. Wow, get your mind out of the gutter, Micah! Which won't happen, but at least I can say I tried.

"Micah!"

I pop out of my day dream of watching Leo running, dripping wet out of the ocean like the scene from every cheesy teen romance ever in order to glare at Beckett. He has ruined my day dream and I am livid.

"Are you even listening?" He asks.

"No."

Beckett rolls his eyes. "Do you want anything to snack on? Misty and I are gonna grab something from the snack table."

There's a snack table? I look around to find some people, probably parents, have set up a place to get snacks. Nodding, I ask Beckett to get me a drink. He nods, takes Misty's hand and the two walk off, leaving me alone on the bleachers. I watch the two head up to the snacks because, honestly, I don't trust Beckett to remember to get me a drink. He's pretty clueless (this is like the pot calling the kettle black, but I digress,) but since Misty is with him, he might remember. And by him I mean her.

Shaking my head, I'm about to turn back to the field when I catch a movement out of the corner of my eye from the parking lot. It's not much, but I turn completely to face the lot. There's nothing for a moment, my eyes glancing over the vehicles one by one. After some time of waiting, I catch a glimpse of someone dressed in a gray hoodie and jeans. He's walking through the lot, hood up and hands in his pockets. Even from this distance I notice the soft movement of his head, like he's scoping out the cars. Maybe I'm too paranoid, but I'm on my feet in a second, heading towards the exit.

I lose sight of the possible thief when I get my hand stamped at the gate so I can get back in. Instead of heading straight for the parking lot, I walk along the outside of the school building, hiding behind the stairs so that no one notices me disappearing into thin air. Once I've hidden myself, I'm marching into the lot to find Mr. Suspicious and it doesn't take long to do so.

He has found his mark, standing next to an older red vehicle parked at a great angle. A tree is at its side, hiding them mostly from view. He's messing with the door, trying to open it when I stand behind him and send a quick kick to his shin. The thief curses, spinning around to see absolutely nothing.

I catch a good look of his face; he's young, probably early twenties with a clover tattoo under his left eye. I snort at the sight, the man's eyes grow wide considering he felt the kick and heard me.

"W-What the hell?" Mr. Cheesy Tattoo says under his breath, pressing his hands and back to the car. He looks ready to wet himself. I don't say anything, simply stand in front of him in amusement while his eyes desperately try to find me, or rather the ghost he probably is imagining. When nothing happens, his shoulders start to relax. He's probably thinking he heard something and the kick wasn't real. It normally starts with denial.

Shaking his head, Mr. Terrible Life Choices turns back around to finish his job, but I kick him in the opposite shin, quickly stepping back afterwards. I'm not surprised when he spins around with knife in hand. He jabs into thin air in a panic like others have done before him.

"Who's there?" He hisses, stepping away from the car in order to walk around the tree. I follow, biting my lip to hold back my snickers. "I know you're there. Come out, come out right fuckin' now."

I glance back when I hear the crowd cheer, signaling the game is over and it seems we've won. Ok, time to get this over with. I'm supposed to meet up with Leo. Wait? When did I decide that I was going to? Ah, I'll have to think about this later. Need to take care of this fool first.

Looking back at Mr. Shit for Brains, I reach out to grab the hem of his pants and, with a single tug, pull them down to his ankles like the mature adult that I am. He shouts in shock, stumbling backwards over the fabric to fall right on his butt so I kick him in the leg. He screams again, getting up this time while desperately trying to put his pants back on in a whacky dance of chicken with his head cut off. I'm snickering the entire time he jumps up and runs away, not even bothering to look back.

Oh man, ok, I admit it, sometimes it's fun being me.

Chuckling, I walk back to the steps I went behind in the first place and reappear. Peeking my head out, I check for any possible looks of shock. Nope, no one is even nearby so I'm good. Stepping back through the gates, I find my assumption of winning to be correct. People are grabbing their belongings and getting ready to leave. The players are leaving the field and the scoreboard says it has ended 3 to 2 with us winning. Beckett looks back at me from the stands, pursing his lips in annoyance while he holds up my drink.

"Where the hell did you go?!"

"To the shitter."

Beckett grimaces. "TMI, dude."

"No one says that anymore."

"I do!"

"We got you a candy bar too, Micah," says Misty, successfully ending our bickering when she hands over my snack. I thank her for it, then take the drink from Beckett without a word.

He gasps. "You are a rude son of a bitch."

I shrug. "True."

"You know what, we were going to invite you to the movies, but now I don't want you to come along!"

"I would have said no anyway," I say through my bites of food causing Beckett to pout. Misty is smiling at his side.

"I'm going to leave you here," Beckett warns, which makes me realize that I can't avoid telling him about Leo since he is the one who drove me. I could lie and say that Leo offered to drive us home since we live right next to each other, but he'll still make a big deal out of it.

"Come on, let's go! The movie starts in, like, thirty minutes."

"I can't go."

Beckett looks down at me while Misty frowns beside him like she thinks I'm actually mad. However, that frown disappears and she matches Beckett's grin at what I have to say.

"I'm going out to eat with Leo."

"Out to eat...just the two of you?" Beckett wiggles his eyebrows suggestively.

"Fuck off."

"I told you they have something going on," Beckett whispers to Misty, who nods in agreement. Oh great, he's going to taint her with his stupidity.

"Nothing is going on," I argue, although I don't see why I try. These two will believe what they believe regardless of what I say, especially with those faces they are making.

"Mhm, whatever, you two have fun," Misty giggles, reaching over to ruffle my hair. "Enjoy your date."

"It's not a date."

"It's absolutely a date."

"Especially if he offers to pay." Beckett winks and, before I can curse either of them out, they're walking away from the bleachers and heading for the parking lot hand in hand.

Great. They're not going to leave me alone about this. I should have said no. This is already a pain and dinner hasn't even started. Catastrophe, here I come!

~

Got some more Leo and Micah interaction this chapter. How will the "date" go? What else do I have planned? :)

Chapter 5

I wait patiently for Leo. He and his teammates have gone to the showers so he'll be back out when he's done. I don't really do anything other than sit here and tap my fingers to an unknown beat against the cool metal of the bleachers.

"What's that you're playing?" A familiar voice asks a few minutes later.

I glance back to find Leo standing on the steps fresh out of the shower. His hair is still damp, cheeks slightly flushed either from the heat of the showers or the outdoors, who knows. He's wearing light jeans and a plain navy top.

"Nothing," I answer, getting up from the bleachers to join him on the stairs. "Was just passing the time."

Leo hums in response, standing before me with a gleeful expression. The two of us stand here for a moment, Leo staring at me with a huge smile while mine slowly turns to confusion.

"Are...we waiting for someone or something?"

"Oh, no, no, just, uh, we can go now," Leo sputters, gesturing towards the parking lot. I nod and start heading out first since he doesn't move until I do.

We get to his parents car, Leo hopping into the drivers side while I slide into the passenger seat. He seems a bit restless, eyes glancing to me while the two of us put on our seatbelts. After they click, he starts the car up, clears his throat then asks, "Where do you want to eat?"

"Wherever. I don't have a preference."

"Chicken wings?"

"Chicken wings are good."

Nodding, Leo pulls out of the lot. The only sound comes from the humming of the engine. It's as awkward as I expected it to be, ten points to Slytherin! Leo, on the other hand, seems a bit down about it. His knuckles are turning white until he stretches his fingers then tries to hold the wheel again.

I should say something to lighten the tension but what's there to say? Knowing me, I'll end the conversation I start in under a minute. Maybe even forty five seconds. I'm almost tempted to try and test it out.

"Were you bored?" Leo asks out of the blue.

"No," I slightly lie. The game had boring moments, but overall, it wasn't terrible. I'd go again if he asked me. "Why?"

"I, well, I noticed you left near the end of it so I thought you weren't going to come back."

Oh, I didn't even think about Leo noticing my absence. I guess it's hard not to notice when there aren't as many people. Judging by the relief, but also concern, on his face it actually bothered him.

"Ah, actually, I saw a guy trying to break into someone's car," I explain.

Leo's eyes shoot open in shock. "W-What?!"

"I got up to tell security and waited for them to check it out."

Technically, it's not a complete lie. I did see a guy trying to break into a car, but it was me who checked it out and got rid of him. Still, it's a believable story as I told it and Leo seems somewhat better after hearing it.

"Did he take anything? Was he arrested? What happened?"

"He ran off when he got caught, didn't manage to take anything though."

"Micah, that's crazy! But it's great that you told someone."

I cock a brow at that, looking at the smile on Leo's face. "Well, obviously I told someone. Why would I ignore it?"

Leo shrugs, seeming to find my question odd while I find his shock odd. It's an oddity fest up in here. Turn up the music.

"Some people don't care enough about others to say anything. You know, you're a bit surprising sometimes."

I am all kinds of confused today. Leo must notice this too because he chuckles and glances at me from the corner of his eye before returning to the road.

"You seem like you don't care about others but you actually do. You're like—" Leo hums, trying to find the right word. "A silent protector."

I open my mouth to argue but end up shutting it in shock. When he puts it like that...I actually sound kind of cool.

Leo doesn't know that it was actually me who scared him off. He doesn't know what else I do, but it still rings true. No one knows it's me. No one thanks me. I don't get anything out of it other than knowing I did the right thing, which is enough for me so...it's kind of true, I guess?

I want to thank him for his kind words but nothing really comes out. I end up leaning against the door, pressing my forehead to the glass in hopes to cool my warming face. Leo says nothing more either, our ride returning silent, but this time, a comfortable one. The buildings and alley's pass one by one and, honestly, many of them hold memories of mine. Memories that no one knows about but me.

A silent protector, huh? I like the sound of that.

There's no conversation leading all the way up to our arrival at a local restaurant. Once parked and inside the place we're taken to a table. When our waitress is gone there is only one word to describe the atmosphere.

Awkward.

Leo is sitting across from me with his menu up, hiding his face like a spy in a rip off James Bond movie. All I can see are his fingers clenching the sides while I'm leaning back into the booth, arms crossed and the menu sitting on the table before me. I already know what I want because I get the same thing the majority of my time. Mom hates it. Whatever, I'm a simple man with simple needs.

I'm not sure if the atmosphere is better or worse when our waitress returns to get our order. She smiles, takes said order and leaves, but Leo keeps the menu up. I cock a brow. He does realize that's weird, right?

"You going to hide behind the menu all night?" I ask, grinning after watching his hands tighten. Slowly, he lowers his shield, revealing quivering blue eyes that leave me very confused and somewhat worried.

"Sorry," Leo says while sitting the menu aside. He rests his hands on the table, twisting his fingers together.

Silence seems to be our favorite pastime, which is mostly my fault. I will easily take the blame for it. My mouth has two settings, blunt and silent, both of which get me into more trouble than I want them to. Leo can't seem to remember how to use his words while, let's be honest, I never learned to properly use mine. Music is playing in the restaurant, loud enough to hear, but soft enough to speak. One would think it'd help the tension but it doesn't. Maybe if they played good music it would.

I'm confused on what Leo wants. Surely he asked me to go out to eat for a reason. There is the crazy idea that, possibly, he does have some sort of crush on me. Why and how? No clue, but his actions point at it as a possibility. Then there's the chance that isn't it and it leaves me baffled on what else it could be.

"You're probably wondering why I asked you to hang out," Leo finally speaks up, hitting the nail right on the head.

"Sure am."

He chuckles, rubbing the back of his neck nervously before sitting his hands atop the table again. Once more he's twiddling his thumbs, staring at the bread basket in front of us like it holds the answers to life. Hey, I love some bread and butter, but I don't know if it can explain the fabric of the universe, even if you stare at it like that.

"The thing is, I've been seriously considering moving into the dorms for college."

That's shocking to hear and it must show on my face because Leo gives an anxious smile. I don't know why he's telling me this, maybe he needs someone to talk to? But he has a million and one friends so I don't get why I'm the one he's confiding in. Do I look like therapist material? Cause, no, I'm probably in more need of one than I am to act like one. Still, I feel this obligation to be a bit serious considering it is...y'know, serious.

"Why?" I ask.

Leo is hesitant to respond, now leaning forward with his arms crossed on the table. He isn't looking at me when he speaks, "I guess...because I'm naive enough to think everything will change in college."

I'm tempted to ask what he means by that, but he cuts me off.

"How'd you do it, Micah?" he asks.

"Do what?"

"Come out."

Oh.

It's like someone has kicked in the dame and all the answers have come flooding in. I suppose it makes a little sense for Leo to come to me. He has openly gay friends, but I wonder if he feels better asking someone a bit more out of the loop for an honest opinion and, well, I am known for being ruthlessly honest.

"Well, I walked up to my mother and said I like dick," I answer.

Leo purses his lips until he sees me smirk. Ok, ok, I'll try to be serious, but he best be paying for my meal then because this shit is not my forte! I'm not capable of sweet pep talks. It physically burns.

Shaking my head, I shrug and try to give a better response, "In all honesty, I simply don't give a crap what others think of me. I am who I am, being gay is one tiny fraction of myself. If someone doesn't like that one fraction, and therefore judges me on it, then they can fuck off. I'm not going to lie about it and I'm not going to change myself for them. I know that doesn't work for everyone, or even most, but it does for me so I don't know if I'm the person you should be seeking advice from."

I know I'm not the majority. People are scared, scared of what or who they will lose. It's not as if I wasn't scared when I came out to Mom and Beckett, but I thought if they did leave me, then isn't that for the best? I don't need those sort of people in my life. I know it would have hurt like hell, more than I could ever imagine. It would have been scary beyond belief. It would have been tough, the toughest thing I ever went through, but in the long run, it would have been better for me. I know that. It didn't make it easy. Coming out is never easy. It just helped with my personal decision to do so.

For whatever reason, Leo chuckles. It doesn't sound amused, something along the lines of sad. Perhaps he expected a different answer but there's not much more I can give. Again, I'm not all that great at comforting people.However, after a shake of his head, Leo looks at me with this unreadable expression that sends chills down my spine. "You're pretty amazing, you know that?"

"Yes, but what makes you say that?"

"You're never scared to be yourself."

Well, I guess that's true in a way. I haven't exactly told anyone about my powers, but I choose not to mention that and, instead, shrug his words off.

"Then, do you plan to come out in college? Is that why you're thinking of living in the dorms, so your parents won't know?" I ask and, judging by the way his shoulders cave in on themselves, the answer is a solid yes. We're quiet. Leo rolls his shoulders.

"Do you...want my honest opinion?" I ask after probably five minutes of tension.

Leo nods.

"I'm not going to sugar coat it."

He nods again.

"Ok, well, then I think that's a terrible idea," I admit.

Leo doesn't have to give me a response. His expression is answer enough.

Crossing my arms, I lean back into the booth and firmly say, "It's not as if you are hiding yourself in a physical wall by going to college, a close one at that. Your parents are going to find out, especially if you decide to be open in college, so isn't it better if they find out the truth from you? I'm not saying it isn't completely terrifying so don't, like, go running to tell them if you aren't ready. But you came to me because you want my opinion so I'm not going to be soft with you about it. I don't think it's a good idea, and you're just trying to push off the inevitable, that's just how I see it."

I'm not sure what Leo expected to get from me. Perhaps he hoped I'd be more understanding, perhaps he thought I'd sit here for hours talking to him so I'm not sure if he's disappointed. Judging by the blank look on his face, he's not even sure if he's disappointed, but I don't take back what I said. That is my honest opinion on the matter.

So, after a few minutes pass without a word, I start to grow a bit anxious. My fingers are tapping against my arms while my toes keep curling in my shoes. Leo's still staring at me with those big blue eyes that should be illegal until, finally, he smiles. I'm very confused as to why, even more so when he starts to chuckle until it turns into full blown laughter.

Oops, seems I've broken him.

Lifting up his hands, Leo hides himself behind them while his face grows red. I can only tell that by the fact that his ears now resemble red beacons. He could probably light up an airstrip. Am I meant to say something or simply sit here until his sanity returns?

"Uh, have you lost it?" I ask after taking a sip of my drink.

"Maybe," Leo answers between his chuckles before peeking through his fingers at me. It's damn adorable and he best stop, but alas, he does not. "You're...pretty amazing."

"You already said that."

"I'm repeating it."

"I don't get why?"

Leo drops his hands, showing off a red face that's slowly simmering to a soft pink. Both colors look equally as good on him. With a shrug, he says nothing but continues to smile brightly. It's giving me a bit of a headache. He needs to be in a toothpaste commercial with a smile that bright.

Our conversation is put on hold by the sudden appearance of our food. The waitress sets it before us before walking off, leaving the two of us in a silence that, somehow, isn't awkward. We're eating our meal quietly. My eyes can't seem to stay off Leo for longer than a few seconds. He's still smiling from ear to ear and it's starting to freak me out, but at the same time, I really like it.

"Ok, the smiling is starting to creep me out. Aren't you going to say anything?" I finally ask, which earns me a teasing grin.

"I never thought you would try to get someone to speak with you."

"Funny. Answer the question."

Leo still grins regardless of my sass. Perhaps he does have a super power, the ability to stay chipper is something I do not possess.

"Don't most people smile when they're happy?"

"But yours is creepy."

Leo pouts and places a hand over his chest. "Ouch."

"We just had a pretty serious conversation and you haven't responded to my shit advice."

"It wasn't shit advice," Leo responds with a firm shake of his head. "I'm...grateful for it."

Yeah, he's insane, it's official. I'm about to voice that, but Leo has more to say.

"You always speak your mind even if it's something others may not want to hear. I know I didn't want to hear that, but I needed to. You're right, I'm just finding more ways to run away from the inevitable." Leo nods like he's somehow affirming that for himself. He looks to me with this sort of confidence that looks different than any I've seen before, although I don't understand how. "I don't want to lie to myself or deceive the people I love because it won't make me happy. Losing them won't either, but I want to be like you."

"Like me?"

"Confident in who I am, no matter what others think."

I may think very highly of myself from time to time, but I sure as hell never believed others felt the same, especially Leo. The way he's looking at me, I don't know how to explain it, only that I love and hate it at the same time. There's part of me that wants to argue with him, he needs to look up to somehow much better, but at the same time, I want that look to only be directed at me.

I bite my lip and focus on my food because I can't stand looking at him any longer. "You need a better role model."

"I don't think there is one."

I shove food in my mouth because there is no way I can respond to that. Everything around me feels lighter, brighter, like the world has opened up for me.

The rest of our dinner is silent. When our waitress returns with the bill, Leo pays for it and I'm reminded of what Beckett said earlier, it's a date if he offers to pay.

Well, damn it all.

After returning to the car, I quickly turn on the radio. Leo doesn't seem to mind and happily lets me flip through the channels to find what I like. I have no idea if he likes rock but that's what we're listening to. He makes no move to change it while I mouth the words to almost every song in the seat next to him. I would say he's tapping his fingers or mouthing along as well, but I don't know because I haven't looked at him since we got in the car. My face is warm. I'm probably blushing and it's his fault for being all...weird earlier. How am I meant to respond to that when I'm already terrible at communication? Seriously, like I said, he needs a better role model.

And, when we finally get home, I let out a sigh of relief. My chest has been aching since we were at the restaurant. Finally, it feels like I can breathe again, but alas, the world

hates me and I am tormented once more by Leo calling to me before I can leave his driveway.

"Micah!"

I'm tempted to keep moving, but damn, I'm too nice and turn around in order to ask, "Yeah?"

"Thanks for today."

"It's...whatever." I shrug, unsure how I could have been of much help even if he seems so adamant that I did. Once again, the look he's giving me is breathtaking. I wish he would stop because I don't know what I'm supposed to do or how I'm supposed to feel.

"See you tomorrow," he says softly.

I wave goodbye, mumbling a quiet "yeah." Opening the door, Mom immediately asks me how everything went, but all I give her is a quick "good" followed by me disappearing up the steps. She could easily follow me, but she doesn't, although I'm sure she's itching to know every detail, which I will never give for obvious reasons.

Sitting in my room, my mind is blank. There should be something, some sort of thought about tonight but there isn't any. Is that good or bad? Maybe this is my brain's way of catching up on whatever the hell that was. Tomorrow, Beckett and Misty are going to want to know what happened, but I don't even know what happened.

I decide to go to bed early. I'm exhausted after what happened today, but it seems I can't even escape Leo in my dreams.

Chapter 6

It's not unusual to wake all hot and bothered because of a boy. It is unusual for that boy to be Leo though. I suppose hanging out with him yesterday explains why I would have an absolutely wonderful dream about him with far less clothes on, but still, can you not get so worked up, body? We need to keep ourselves composed around the hot soccer boy next door that we now know could possibly be interested in us and...this isn't helping. I need a cold shower.

That is exactly what I get, a very cold shower before heading downstairs to get some breakfast. Mom is already up and moving about outside in the garden. She'll probably ask me to help pull weeds later so I better run like the hounds of hell are at my heels before she can do that.

As if Beckett somehow heard my thoughts, my phone goes off from his text. I'm not surprised to see his words in a complete mess asking how last night went and if I'm still single. I roll my eyes and reply with two words, still single.

My phone rings. I don't answer it and eat my breakfast. It rings again so I put it on silent. About thirty minutes later, after I have eaten breakfast and went back upstairs to play games, the biggest annoyance of my life arrives.

"Why do you always ignore me?!" Beckett hollers into my room after practically kicking open the door.

"Put a dent in my door and you're replacing it."

"We wouldn't have to worry about that if you answered your damn phone."

"I did answer. You just wanted to pester me."

Beckett pouts before dropping next to me in one of my bean bag chairs. With his arms crossed, he glares at me while waiting for some sort of response, probably an elaboration. Obviously, I don't give him that and it results in him asking, "So what happened?"

"We had dinner."

"And?"

"Came home."

"I hate you so much."

"Ditto."

Beckett grumbles about me for about ten minutes before finally realizing that, nope, he ain't gettin' anything out of me. So, with a heavy sigh, he joins me in playing some video games while talking about Misty. Apparently, she wants him to go to a family get together, which he's pretty nervous about. I don't blame him. He's such a screw up, something is bound to happen. When I voice this he nearly goes into tears. Ah, it feels so good to be an unsupportive friend. I make him brownies and feed him a couple later though so all is forgiven. Then, sometime before dinner, Mom shouts something a bit shocking up the stairs.

"Micah, Leo's here, I'm sending him up!"

Beckett looks at me with such a perverted grin that I shove him out of the chair then kick him in the ass until my bedroom door opens. I'm not sure what Leo is thinking about when he sees me assaulting Beckett, who's still grinning like a madman, but judging by his cocked brow, it's probably pure confusion.

"Leo!" Beckett shouts and jumps to his feet. "Hey, what's up?"

"Uh, I was just—" Leo bites his lip and Beckett takes that as his cue to leave because he's a jerk like that.

"I actually have to go, what a pity, we all could have played some games. We'll have to hang out some other time," Beckett says quickly and it's so obvious he's trying to run off that even Leo appears a bit uncomfortable.

Still, Beckett smiles, saying goodbye to the both of us then runs out the door...only to peek his head back, but not enough that Leo can see him. He gives me a wink followed by a thumbs up. That's it, I'm going to kill him and shoot his remains into space.

Once Beckett is gone, I give Leo an apologetic expression. "Sorry, Beckett's an idiot."

"I wouldn't say that, he's pretty funny."

"I definitely wouldn't say that."

Leo chuckles and continues to awkwardly stand in my room. Seeing as he isn't making any move to sit down, I gesture for him to do so while asking, "You going to stand there all day?"

With a shy nod, Leo walks over and sits beside me. I'm not sure why he's here or what he wants, especially since we just saw each other yesterday. This is simply weird, seeing each other so often. Not necessarily weird in a bad sense, simply, weird.

"Do you need something?" I ask since Leo hasn't said anything. My voice somehow startles him because he jumps then looks at me with wide blue eyes.

"Huh?"

"Do you need something?" I repeat, cocking a brow when I find Leo staring with a blank expression. Normally there's something, embarrassment, curiosity, happiness, but right now, it seems he's so lost that his own face doesn't know what the hell it's up to.

He hesitates to respond, opening and shutting his mouth continuously like the words can only make it half way up his throat before disappearing. Then, after a deep breath, Leo says, "I...was thinking of coming out to my parents tonight."

My eyes widen. I knew he had been considering it, but is he sure he wants to do it so soon? We just talked about it last night, so I happily voice my concern. "Are you sure you're ready for that? Don't jump in head first just because of what I said."

"But I don't think I ever actually will be, ready, I mean."

True. Most people can work up all the courage in the world and still feel like running away at the mere idea of coming out.

"Any reason why?"

"Mom's making a special dinner tonight as a celebration for getting my college acceptance letter."

"Oh...congrats."

Leo rolls his eyes at my poor excuse of a congratulations. Even I feel a bit stupid for giving such a crap response. However, his smile tells me that it in no way bothers him, which baffles me. I guess Leo is too nice for his own good. Instead, he shrugs and goes on to say, "I thought I could bring it up tonight. Hopefully the good news will put them in...a good mood?"

"Understandable."

Leo brings his legs up to his chest, wrapping his arms around them so he can rest his chin atop his knees. "I've been trying to think of what to say, but the closer dinner gets the more messed up my speech becomes."

"Does it have to be a speech?"

"Just saying "Mom, Dad, I'm gay" doesn't seem like the best way to tell them."

"But it's the truth. It doesn't have to be some grand speech. You don't have to explain yourself. You're gay, just tell them that."

"What if they aren't ok with it?"

That's the question I was hoping he wouldn't ask. Seeing Leo staring at me with wide and horrified eyes makes my skin crawl. That's the question we always ask. It doesn't matter how kind our parents come across as. It doesn't matter if they have marched in every LGBTQ+ parade or how often they shout their support from the rooftops. It doesn't matter how much they claim to love us. There's always fear. Always fear that we'll be the exception and our worlds will come crashing down without warning.

"Don't think about it. You'll cross that bridge if it gets here," I say while reaching out to ruffle his short blonde hair. I have no idea why I'm doing it but it seems to be working. The tension in his shoulders slowly dwindles away while the blush on his cheeks only grows.

"Thanks."

"You already thanked me."

"I'm thanking you again." Leo sends me a smile that should be illegal. He's about to be arrested for being too cute and I hate that I even thought that. Someone send help.

Clearing my throat, I drop my hand and turn away to keep playing my game because I can't stand the sight of him anymore. It's making my heart act like it just ate a pound of straight sugar and I don't appreciate it. Leo chuckles, either at my reaction or simply from nerves, I'm not sure.

The silence is killing me. It's not awkward, but there's certainly a strange feeling, something lingering in the air. Every now and again I glance at Leo out of the corner of my eye and, sometimes, I caught him looking at me. When I do, he smiles sheepishly at

getting caught then looks away with the blush remaining on his face. Can I say that it's official? He has to like me. Why? Who knows, but he definitely likes me.

Rather than sitting here awkwardly doing absolutely nothing, I decide to try and make conversation by asking, "What college are you going to?"

"Memphis."

Hey, that's the college I got into by pure dumb luck. While Leo has a reason he wants to go, mine is far more simple. It's close. I'll get to sleep in. I choose not to tell him that though.

"Ah, they have a good soccer team."

"Yeah, I actually got a tour over the summer!" Leo perks up, his eyes brightening at the mere mention of his favorite sport. I'm a bit shocked on how he went from depressed to brighter than a supernova in under 0.2 seconds.

"They have a huge gym with an absolutely amazing training regime. I've been trying to work it into my own so I'll be ready by next year. Oh! And their cafeteria has so many different options. I could probably eat there everyday over the next four years and never get tired of—" Leo stops mid sentence causing me to give him a curious glance. Slowly, his smile fades before he bites his lip and says, "Sorry, I got a little over enthusiastic."

I shrug, choosing not to mention how I like it or the fact that I, too, had a tour. "Not really. Keep talking."

"About college?"

"Anything."

For whatever reason, my answer baffles him because his expression turns apathetic. I'm not sure if I said something wrong, but I haven't the time to ask. Again, he cheers right back up, smiling from ear to ear while chuckling, "I thought you weren't the type to really care."

"Do you think so little of me?" I tease, smirking at the pure panic that Leo shows.

"N-No! That's not, I didn't mean—"

"I'm messing with you." I elbow him playfully in the side. Wow, how can his cheeks stay that red for so long? It's impressive, or am I impressive for keeping them that way?

"You're kind of an ass," he grumbles.

"Only kind of?"

Leo ignores my teasing, either because he is excited to keep talking or because he knows he can't beat me (probably both), and goes on to talk about school. Seems that it was his first choice, that he's been aiming for it since sophomore year. I don't know much about soccer, but I know they have a good team and, judging by how Leo talks about them, it could lead to a real career.

I always assumed Leo played soccer with the intention of quitting after college, but it seems it's the opposite. He seriously wants to play soccer for the rest of his life. I shouldn't be surprised. It's pretty impressive how he has so many plans already laid out for his future in case one doesn't work out. I'm just hoping I don't end up getting shot in an alley or something. People who have their shit together are scary.

"Have you heard back from any colleges?" Leo asks.

"Yeah, I'm going to Memphis."

Leo hacks on his own spit, I think. He's hacking on something anyways while I'm grinning from ear to ear. I watch him suffer a bit longer before patting his back ever so lovingly (it's not lovingly.)

With wide eyes, Leo looks to me and asks, "W-What?"

"I'm going to Memphis. I'll probably see you in a class or two."

Leo's at a loss for words. It's funny watching him try to come up with something to say. In the end, he literally squeaks out, "But...you had me talking about it for, like, 20 minutes?"

"Mhm."

"And you already knew all that information."

"Mhm."

"Why?"

"You were excited about it," I answer, sitting my controller aside since I can't really concentrate on my game. "Might as well let you talk."

Leo hesitates to respond to me. I'm not sure why, but I never find out either because his phone suddenly goes off. The both of us look at said phone and I'm guessing it's his Mom saying that dinner is ready, or about to be, based on his worried frown. Our earlier conversation is forgotten in an instant.

"I...I better get going," he says more to himself than me.

Nodding, I stand up along with Leo, who looks ready to ask what I'm doing, but I beat him to it, "I can walk you out."

Leo doesn't give much of a response. His hands are shaking. So, with a nod, he steps out of my room with me right behind. Mom says goodbye and I'm surprised Leo can offer her up a smile. The two of us walk out the door in silence and over to his yard, where Leo suddenly turns around to look at me.

"If...if things don't go well, can I come back over?" He asks, his voice so soft that it's hard to hear. His eyes are visibly shaking, the once light blue somehow darkening with concern.

"Yeah. My door's always open."

My words relieve Leo enough to let out a heavy sigh. He's still shaking. Even his breaths are coming out in uneven patterns. I've never been good with words. Grand speeches or soft encouragements elude me so, I do about the only thing I can think of.

I wrap my arms around Leo's shoulders. The moment I do, his entire body freezes. I'm not sure if my hug is even that good, or what a good hug even consists of, but I'm trying my best here. When Leo's arms suddenly wrap around my waist, I take that as a sign that the hug is greatly appreciated so we remain like this for a while longer.

"It'll be ok," I say since that's about the only thing I can come up with. Leo nods against my shoulder, his warm breath heating up said shoulder, but I don't ask him to pull away nor do I try to move. I patiently wait for Leo to work up whatever courage he needs until, finally, he pushes me back.

His face is red. I'm not sure if that's because of the hug or how nervous he is. With a wave, Leo backs away, spins on his heel then bolts into his house. All I can do now is hope for the best. Shit, now even I'm getting nervous.

Turning around, I head back up the porch. However, before I open the door, a sudden chill runs down my spine. I'm quick to spin around, looking about the street because I have a bad feeling, like someone is watching me. The occasional car passes, there's a

couple out walking their dog and an elderly woman sitting on her front porch, nothing out of the ordinary, but for some reason, my gut is twisting.

I pass it off as worrying about how Leo's dinner will go.

Chapter 7

Leo never returns and I'm not sure how I'm meant to interpret that. I would text him but I don't have his number so I go to sleep without much of an answer. I don't have time to speak with him the next day either because I go out with Beckett and Misty. Most of the day I'm thinking about it, which means Beckett tries to ask what's bothering me, to which I always reply, "You are."

He eventually stops asking. I've trained him well, while Misty...

"Are you and Leo a thing yet?"

I stare at her like she's grown a second head. "What?"

"You two have been spending a lot of time together. Beckett said he even came over to your house yesterday!"

"We're neighbors."

"So? I don't even speak with my neighbors."

"Are you sure they just aren't speaking to you?"

Misty scowls. She walked into that and she knows it.

"Hey, what's wrong with telling us about your super hot neighbor that you're possibly dating?" Misty huffs, crossing her arms with a cute pout. Beckett practically turns into a pile of goo just from looking at her. I roll my eyes. He's ridiculous.

"We're not dating." I sigh.

"So you agree that he's super hot?"

"I would have to be blind not to agree with that."

Misty giggles and Beckett returns to his natural solid state in order to return his attention to me.

"Tell me you at least have his number now," he says like he's lecturing a kid for taking a cookie from the cookie jar.

I take a sip from my drink, which gives Beckett his answer. Their jaws drop in unison. Huh, fascinating.

"You don't have his phone number?!" Misty cries in disbelief. She actually looks offended. "How? Why?"

"Never asked."

"Why?!"

I shrug. That's a good question. It never came up in conversation. Either way, I stop answering their inquiries, choosing to eat my food in silence. Eventually, the two stop asking upon realizing that, no, I am not playing their game anymore even if I do agree that it's stupid that I don't have his number yet. I wouldn't be wondering how things went with his parents if I had it, but whatever, it's too late now.

That night Beckett brings me home. I wave goodbye to the crazies while they pull out of the driveway and head off down the street. Once they're gone, I head for the nearest bus stop. It's been a while since I've gone out on my own. I've been a bit busy with Leo so I'm starting to feel restless. It's official. I am an adrenaline junky with an addiction. Someone send me to see Dr. Phil.

My evening is pretty chaotic, actually. Upon reaching town, I find myself getting into all kinds of trouble, or rather, getting others out of said trouble. First, there's a lady that gets her purse nabbed like in the movies. I'm somewhat impressed it happened. She's shouting at those around her in hopes for help but gets none. Why would she? She's a stranger. But I happen to catch the incident and run after the thief, tripping the idiot before he gets more than a block. It's fun watching him face plant. Even more so seeing his wide eyes when the purse is lifted off the ground. He screams so loud I think he shatters my ear drums before running. I throw the purse around the corner and watch the lady hesitantly, and definitely very confused, walk over to grab it. She looks around for whomever helped her, sees no one and walks off, looking over her shoulder as she does.

Then some poor kid nearly gets mugged in the park. Four on one isn't exactly a fair fight, unless you're me. He looks younger than me, nervously handing over his wallet and shaking like a leaf. One mugger is pulling the money out while the others are huddled around the poor boy snickering until I punch one and they all panic. I have to cover my mouth to hold back my laughter when the muggers start throwing punches at nothing. They're swinging their arms, nervously shouting and screaming after every hit I give them. Doesn't take long before they all run off screaming about ghosts. The kid resembles The Scream painting. And I'm fairly certain he's going to pass out based on

how blue his face is getting, but he ends up running away in fear, also shouting about a ghost.

Why is ghost most people's first instincts? Ghosts are more the type to fling objects around or levitate you off the ground, not punch you, but whatever.

Next a store is almost robbed. What is up tonight? Is it a full moon? All the nuts are out! A man and woman have broken into a local store and are emptying out the cash register when I come around. I just push them around inside until the cops arrive because of the alarm. They're also shouting about a "strange invisible force." Well, at least they didn't call me a ghost. It's all the usual little things I happen to catch. Living in a large city makes finding trouble rather easy, especially in the evenings. Certain areas are known to attract trouble so those are the places I tend to investigate. Also the places Misty told me not to visit, but hey, my middle name is Trouble!

I'm not sure why I do it, it isn't because I'm nice. At least, I don't feel that's the reason. Maybe I'm just bored or maybe I'm another teen looking to rebel in my own way, who knows. It is what it is, or rather, I am what I am.

When Mom messages me I know it's best to get home. I can only pull off my lie of being with Beckett for so long before she might suspect something. It's a little after eleven pm when I get home, glancing at Leo's porch when I grow near. I'm a little shocked to see him sitting on the front steps with his phone in his hand. His head is down but there's a smile on his face.

I speak without even realizing it, "Hey."

Leo's head shot up at the sound of my voice. Our eyes lock for a moment before his eyes visibly shake. "Micah, h-hey, what are you doing out so late?"

"Was out with Beckett and Misty." I gesture over my shoulder to the bus stop down the street. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing really, messing around on my phone."

I nod. A silence lingers between us. Leo is having a hard time looking at me. He keeps glancing at his phone then me then the road then back to me, so on so forth. I, on the other hand, keep my gaze directly on him. I'm not sure if that bothers him or not.

"How'd it go?" I end up asking, causing Leo to hum. "With your parents."

His smile is instant and answer enough. However, it's relieving to hear him let out a chuckle. "So much better than I ever expected it to."

"Told you, they adore you."

Leo nods while rubbing the back of his neck. "I kinda feel bad for doubting them."

"It's understandable. No one ever really knows how their family will react."

Leo takes a few steps towards me. I wait patiently for the boy to work up the nerve to move further than that. It takes a few minutes. It's fun to watch, but I say nothing. Not sure if that makes it better or worse. Finally, Leo is in front of me, glancing at his phone again then back at me.

"Uh...listen, I would really—" Leo slips his thumb into the belt loop of his jeans, beginning to twist it between his finger from nerves. "I really want to thank you for helping me lately."

"You don't need to thank me. It's not like it was any trouble."

"I know but—" Leo looks to the ground, giving me time to glance at his phone that he's gripping tightly. I'm sure I'm not meant to see it, but I can make out a few open tabs that he was probably flipping through earlier. There's something about a new restaurant nearby, movies and the zoo.

Ah, I get it.

I act like I didn't snoop on his phone and go on to make a "request" of my own. "Take me to the zoo."

Leo raises his head in shock. "Huh?"

"You can thank me by taking me to the zoo."

"Really?"

"Yeah, unless you have a better idea?"

Leo furiously shakes his head. His cheeks have heated up considerably, staining themselves a bright red. "No, the zoo is a great idea! I love the zoo! You know they just put in a zipline?"

"Cool."

"I've never been ziplining, but I think it'd be fun. I read that it goes over the new exhibit they just put in!"

"Yeah, what's in it?"

It seems Leo has done his research because he gushes about the new animals. He even pulls it up on his phone, likely forgetting that he was searching it seconds ago. I'll let him think I don't know anything. It's cute watching him talk so animatedly about it. I find myself smirking, which eventually garners his attention because his eyes suddenly go wide after about ten minutes of him talking and me listening.

"Sorry...am I talking too much?"

I shake my head. "Not at all. What makes you say that?"

"You're quiet."

"I'm always quiet, definitely doesn't mean I'm not interested."

Leo's blush reaches from his neck to the tips of his ears. I feel very accomplished. However, Mom steps out from the house before Leo can go on. She notices us talking then smiles when she says, "Boys, why don't you come inside? It's too late to be hanging out on the street."

"Sorry, I was just about to head back in!" Leo calls in response before returning his attention to me. Mom giggles and heads back inside. There's a soft smile on Leo's face when he starts to back away from me. "So...we can go next weekend, if that's ok?"

"Sounds good."

"I'll text you the details later."

"Don't you need my number for that?" I ask, causing Leo to stop midstep. He nearly stumbles over causing me to chuckle when he barely catches himself. Good thing he has those sportsman-like reflexes or he probably would have fallen right on his face.

"R-Right! Um...can I have your number?"

"I don't know, can you?" I know my grin is evil, but it's so worth seeing the pout on Leo's face. Snickering, I tell him my number, which he eagerly puts into his phone before sending me a text.

I got his number. Beckett would be proud, but I'm going to keep this to myself.

"I should head back inside." Leo gestures behind him, waving goodbye to me, which I return. However, before he steps back inside, I call out to him. He glances over his shoulder with a curious gaze.

"Goodnight, Leo."

I think he's stopped breathing. His mouth is clamped shut, but even from here, I catch him swallowing the lump in his throat before he sputters, "G-Goodnight, Micah."

And with that, he swings open his door and runs inside. He's way cuter than I ever thought he could be. However, he's not the only one acting up. My heart's throwing the biggest rave imaginable. I never thought Leo and I would do anything more than say hi when we passed each other by. Our interactions have always been short and to the point, usually forced until recently. That's mostly my own fault. I'm not one for communication. Leo balances that out well though. Hopefully, it remains that way or our excursion to the zoo will be boring as shit.

Shaking my head, I decide not to think about it. I'm sure it will be fine. We'll have fun. So, rather than stand out on the sidewalk all night, I spin on my heel to head to my porch. Sadly, I never make it there.

Something cold is pressed into my side when a familiar voice says, "Hey, Freak."

An arm is slung around my shoulder moments before a body leans against my own. Glancing down, I find that the cold object is a gun hiding in the hoodie pocket of this stranger. Because of that, this looks like nothing more than an interaction between two friends when that definitely is not the case. Slowly, I turn my gaze upwards to find myself face to face with the man with a clover tattoo. The one from the soccer game.

Damn it.

"Don't think about disappearin' on me," he says like he somehow read my thoughts. Nodding to the side, he gestures to a car down the street parked alongside the road. The windows are tinted but it's obvious he didn't come alone. "Who knows what will happen to that beautiful mother of yours."

My stomach is twisting into a giant knot.

"You know, a freak show like you should probably wear a mask," he teases with a sick grin that could rival The Joker.

Even if it's obvious I'm caught, I play dumb. My voice is shaking when I ask, "What are you talking about?"

He huffs then shakes his head afterwards. I flinch when the gun moves just a tad due to nothing more than his natural body movement. Seeing this only causes the jerk to grin more.

"You know, I thought I was crazy that night...happenin' to see a kid appear out of thin air under the stairs."

I bite my bottom lip, my eyes peer up at the porch. I pray Mom doesn't walk out before looking back at him. His deep brown eyes are narrowed on me. I swear, time is frozen. Each second feels like a lifetime.

"But then some friends of mine came runnin' to me talkin' bout some ghost that beat them up and another guy swore he was jumped but nothing was there. Strange coincidence, don't you think?"

"Very."

He furrows his brow. The air suddenly grows colder than the inside of a freezer on the arctic tundra.

"What do you want?" I ask, already tired of whatever the hell this is. I need to get back inside soon. If Mom walks back out, I don't know what he'll do. I don't know what I'll do.

"Now that's a smart question, Micah."

I hate hearing him speak my name. It causes my teeth to grind, which doesn't go unnoticed. His grip around my shoulder tightens while the barrel of his gun is dug deeper into my side. I think I've forgotten how to breathe.

"No worries, I don't want anythin' tonight."

I don't know how that is meant to make me not worry.

"But, you see, some buddies and I were chattin' and we think you could be a lot of help to us," he says with an enthusiastic nod. "With that disappearin' act of yours, we could make a great team."

I don't like the sound of that at all. My expression must state this because he chuckles, which dies the moment I say, "I'm not really a team player."

"I don't think you're in any position to be crackin' jokes, kid." To remind me of my position, he presses the gun further into my side. The pressure tells me there will be a bruise later.

"Now, listen up, tomorrow some friends of mine want to chat to you about a little job." He opens the hand on my shoulder to show a piece of paper between his fingers. Slowly, I take it and open it to find an address that I recognize. It's a not so friendly part of town, a fitting place for him and his friends I'm sure.

"Be there tomorrow at four pm, and I suggest you not put up a fight. I'd hate to see the look on Beckett's face if something happened to Misty."

I whip my head to the side, staring at him with wide eyes. When he sees my shock, he sends me a wink; such a simple action makes a shiver run down my spine. He even knows that much? Has he been watching me nonstop since the soccer match? Have his so-called friends been watching me too? They had to if they honestly believed him. They had to have caught me.

"Such a pretty girl like her has a lot to lose."

"Don't you—"

"Touch her?" He interrupts, pulling away while roughly patting my back. Finally, the gun is taken out of my side but I do nothing. Even if I call the cops, I don't know who else he has told, where they are or if the cops could reach them all in time. "We won't, as long as you cooperate, nothin' will happen to them...or that sweet Leo of yours."

My hands turn into fists at my side, the action only causes him to cackle while he backs away. His hands are in his pockets, ready to pull the gun out at any minute. "I'll be seein' you soon, Micah, and remember... *we* got our eyes on you."

He waves goodbye like he didn't just threaten the lives of everyone around me before strutting down the street. I watch him speak to whoever is in the vehicle but he doesn't get in. Instead, he looks back at me with that twisted smile then walks away while the car remains like a looming threat.

No, not like, it *is* a threat.

My brain is on the verge of being fried. Even if I know to get inside, my body doesn't listen. When I try to step forward, my legs turn to jello and I wobble to the side, barely catching myself on the railing. Bit by bit, I work my way up the porch, my hands clutching the railings to keep me upright. My heart is beating faster than I ever imagined it could. My skin is burning, like I want to scrub it off. My mind is reeling. I don't even know what I'm thinking. What just happened? Is any of this even real?

Pushing open the front door, I step inside, shutting and locking it behind me even if I know if they wanted in they'd find a way.

"I saw you talking to Leo!" Mom squeals from the kitchen without turning back to face me. Good. I don't know if I can handle it. Her following words don't reach me though. I rush over to her. She's unaware of me until I suddenly wrap my arms around her from behind, burying my face into the back of her neck. She jumps but giggles while patting my arms around her waist.

"Micah, what are you doing?" She laughs, now rubbing the skin of my arm. "Honey, you're shaking. Are you feeling sick? What's wrong?"

Everything. Everything's wrong and I can't say a word.

Part of me says to tell Mom, she could help, but an even larger part says no way in hell. I'm not risking it. Unlike me, Mom doesn't know the expanse of her abilities. My disappearing act and her moving through objects are no guarantee to stop a bullet.

And call the cops? Have them pick up the guys in that vehicle quietly, but I know that won't fix anything. That clover piece of garbage is still out there. I'm not sure who else he has told. He has been following me, who else has done the same? If even one person knows, if even one of them escapes the cop's grasp, they can hurt everyone in my life.

I can't do anything.

I've been pretending to be a hero all this time and now I'm facing the consequences. Mom was right. I should have done nothing with it. I should have stayed home, where it was safe. I got cocky, disappearing and reappearing in broad daylight, thinking hiding under some damn steps would be enough to shield the truth. I am such a damn fool.

"Micah, seriously, what's wrong?" Mom asks.

"Nothing," I lie, pulling away to head for the stairs. My voice is low. It has to be or she may hear the shaking in it. "Nothing's wrong."

Mom probably doesn't believe me, but even if she asks again I'm not going to answer. I run up the stairs to the bathroom where I quickly turn on the shower. Normally showers make me feel better, but in this instance, I just feet sick. I kneel down, my head hanging over like I'm going to throw up but never do.

What the hell am I going to do? What can I do?

The water beats against my back. It's starting to burn.

Whatever happens tomorrow, I know it can't be good. It's pretty obvious what some thugs like them want someone like me to do. Illegal, shady work that I could easily get away with. I'm like a golden goose to them. A walking, living, breathing system to thievery. An invisible Robin Hood, except he would steal from everyone and never give it to the needy. There's no way out of this unless I find out who all knows and...

And what?

Report all of them to the police and simply hope the cops can get to them before they get to me? Because the only way they'll leave me alone is if they are forced to do so.

Damn it. Damn it!

The remainder of my evening is spent in turmoil. I retire to my room where I continuously look out my bedroom window. Each time I do, the car is there. Like a stain in my life. It's there. It won't leave. I wonder who is in it. I wonder who else knows. I consider disappearing this instant, running out there and bashing them over the head with a rock, but know that it will only make the situation worse.

My hands are sweaty. I'm pacing. Everything is suddenly changing. I think over my chances of getting out of this alive. It suddenly feels like my whole world is crashing in around me. I hate it.

I hate it.

I hate it.

I fucking hate it!

But...there is one thing I hate more than their threat. The fact that I'm sitting here whining about not being able to do anything.

Screw that!

What am I doing? Panicking, and that isn't what I should be doing because this is my power. Not my mother's. Not my family's. Not theirs. Not anyone's. Mine. My life.

Of course I can do something. I'm not some damn tool they can pick up and use for their own personal gain. Come on, Micah! I've been around thugs like this before. I've handled them. I've handled every damn problem thrown my way. Sure, this is something I've never faced before, but I'm not going to lie on my back and take it. If this idiot and his pals honestly believe I'm going to go along with this without a fight then they have another thing coming. I'll show them what this freak show is capable of.

The silent protector is going to have to take the back seat for a while because it may not be today, it may not be tomorrow, but soon, I'm going to make them regret the day they ever thought about messing with me and my loved ones.

~

Oh snap! What is Micah going to do now? TUNE IN NEXT TIME FOR INVISIBLE BOY! *runs cheesy anime outro*

Chapter 8

"Something's up, he's been in an unusually bad mood all day," Beckett attempts to whisper to Misty during lunch. I say attempt because Beckett can't whisper to save his life. His voice has two volumes, loud and really loud.

"If we find Leo I bet that will put a smile on his face."

The two snicker, but it lasts all of a second when they realize I don't give them so much as a glare. Yeah, yeah, very shocking. I am well aware, no need to point it out or act on it. Please, let me be emo in peace. Typically I'd be on them about their bullshit, either cursing or insulting them. Obviously I'm not doing that because I am in a pretty awful mood. I'm sitting at our lunch table poking at my food that I end up pushing over to Beckett with a heavy sigh.

"You eat it. I'm not hungry," I grunt, standing up just as Beckett's jaw drops.

"You aren't hungry? Something really is wrong."

"Do you need to see the nurse?" Misty asks.

Both of them are ignored. It isn't like I can talk to either of them. I can't talk to anybody and that's super frustrating. For once I want to talk yet I can't. Does this count as karma? Is this some screwed up torture from the universe? Because, if it is, Universe, you can go die in a ditch.

Everything about me is simply off today, for obvious reasons. Last night I didn't get a wink of sleep, which only adds to my already terrible mood. Then, when I looked out my bedroom window this morning, I saw the car remained. Before I left for school, a different vehicle took its place so the other could follow me. Knowing that there are creeps watching my home, or worse, following my mom, puts my teeth on edge.

Wait, that's not right. My everything is on edge. Every sound, every movement, it's maddening, forcing my paranoia to work over time. Every corner I'm waiting to see Clover—his name for the time being—standing there with a grin. Every second I'm waiting for my phone to go off to tell me something has happened to my mom. I even find myself constantly looking out the windows at school. When I do, I end up spotting that stupid car somewhere.

Clover wasn't joking, they are certainly keeping an eye on me.

Ok, think, Micah. Think. I can't let this get to me. I need to stay calm. I need to outsmart these losers. I can do that because, in the end, I'll have the upper hand. I have freaking super powers, that got me into this mess to begin with, but it will get me right back out. Today is about collecting information. I have to see these idiots after school so, if they are watching me then I'll be watching them. I must listen to every word they say. I must remember their names, their faces, what they drive, what they own, what they sound like, every little detail needs to be kept.

So, let's start with what I already know.

There's at least two cars; the one tailing me and the one at my home. There's a slim chance whoever watched me last night is continuing to do so. It's probably safe to count one person in each vehicle, that totals to two strangers and Clover. My first priority is to find out how many know then I can start thinking of how to get rid of them all at once, maybe even call the cops after discovering?

Groaning, I slam my head against the desk. Going to school today was pointless. I don't pay attention to a word. My mind is not in the present, so much so that I nearly miss the final bell ringing. I don't even remember how the end of the day got here so fast. Upon hearing the bell, my entire body stiffens. Questions like what they plan to have me do and if I can even do it fill my head. The last thing I want is to let them have their way but I know, right now, that's my only option. My life really has become a comic. Terrific.

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I get up from my desk while giving Beckett a quick goodbye. I make sure to make it out of the room before he can ask me what's wrong. Seriously, I'd tell him if I could, I'd sit with him for hours whining and cursing, but it's best for the both of us that I don't. Who would have imagined the day would come when I'd have to risk my neck for Beckett? What a load of bullshit! I can't even rub it in and make him be grateful about it! I'm too nice for my own good.

I'm rushing out of school, uncaring of anyone I happen to hit along the way. Outside, I notice my babysitting squad across the street. The car's running, ready to follow me. I give them points for not picking me up, continuing to remain anonymous while also not being seen with me. They aren't complete idiots, which sucks for me. I sure am getting the short end of the stick lately.

"Hey Micah!"

I stop dead in my tracks and spin around to find Leo waving enthusiastically at me from the doorway. On instinct, I wave back.

Hold up, instinct? Since when was it instinct to wave back? Oh no, Leo is contagious. I'm starting to naturally be nice. Someone, quick, give me an antidote, I can't deal.

"You heading home?" Leo asks after running down the steps to meet up with me.

I happen to notice Beckett and Misty coming out of the doorway. Both notice us, grin from ear to ear, then go on their merry way. I'm somewhat grateful, otherwise both would probably chase me down to try and make me talk. At the same time, I'm in such a bad mood that I don't really want to be around Leo either, which makes me feel even worse.

"Uh...no," I answer, glancing over my shoulder. My spine tingles at the thought of those creep's eyes being anywhere near Leo. "I'm tutoring tonight."

I shouldn't be so proud of myself for coming up with such quick lies, but in this instance, it's really coming in handy.

"Oh...ok, that's—that's cool." Leo's shoulders drop. Something tells me he wanted to hang out and, trust me, I would prefer that over what I'm about to do, but it's not like we can change that. Seeing Leo so blue though makes me feel unpleasant. I'm having enough of those feelings already so I try to think of a way to change that.

"I'll text you when I'm done," I say in hopes to see that spark return to his eyes. I'm happy to say it works.

Leo smiles from ear to ear when he says, "Ok! I'll be waiting, or, I mean, y'know, I always have my phone on me so it's not like I'm specifically waiting, just—"

I have the biggest grin right now, feeling a sense of calm. "Just what?"

Leo must have realized he walked himself into a corner. He's clutching the strap to his duffle bag, readjusting it over his shoulder with his gaze locked on the ground. I strain myself to hear his soft voice over the sound of those around us. "Just...I'll...be waiting."

"Ok, I'll talk to you later then."

"Mkay."

With that, I give Leo a smirk that has him playfully rolling his eyes. At least I am heading off on a happier note. Damn, Misty and Beckett were right. I see Leo and I'm in a better mood. This shouldn't be ok with me nor should it work so easily, but I haven't the time to complain or think about it. There are far more pressing matters, sadly.

Hopping onto the closest bus, I head in the direction of the address given to me. I pull the paper from my pocket to stare at the scribbled address. The closer I get the worse the neighborhood becomes until I'm in the part of town Mom always told me to avoid as a kid. She always said if I happened to get lost or miss my stop to never, ever, get off here.

Sorry Mom.

Even the bus driver gives me a sympathetic look. I'm used to it though, considering I've gone to not so nice places before to practice. Shrugging it off, I jump out, punch the address into my phone and look for the place, which has to end up being an old boarded up building probably used to store dead body parts and copious amounts of dirt. It has no usable entrances that I can see either.

"What an obedient thing you are," a stranger says, catching my attention.

Looking over, I find a man leaning against the building at the edge of the alley. His mop of black hair is hidden beneath a baseball cap while his clothes are tattered and dirty. Seconds later a girl appears behind him. She's twitching uncontrollably, green eyes opened wide in interest while her short blonde hair is a ruffled mess. Actually, she looks oddly familiar, I actually think I stopped her from stealing something before.

"Come along, Micah. Let's see what you can do," Mop Head says with a gesture of his hand and no introduction, not that I expected one. I roll my eyes, but do as I'm told considering I can't really do anything else. Yet.

So I've seen three people in total (which I've already guessed as much), Blondie, Mop Head, and Clover. Glancing about, I find that the car from earlier isn't following us. Either they left because I'm with these two buffoons or the ones driving the cars earlier are these buffoons.

"What exactly am I doing?" I ask, following the two through the alley and down the opposite street. They're quite confident, neither of them are looking back to check if I'm following.

"You'll see, you'll see!" Blondie sings after a lighthearted giggle. "Oh, if this works we're gonna—"

Mop Head smacks Blondie over the back of the head. She squeaks in shock, looking up at him with wide eyes that then follow his gaze. Both are now looking back at me, their walk slowing for a moment while Mop Head puts his arm around Blondie's shoulder and pulls her close.

"Keep your trap shut around the kid, got it?"

Blondie nods.

Well, one of them knows not to talk. That's going to be an issue for me.

"Here we are, kiddo," Mop Head announces just a few minutes later when the three of us come to a stop in some other dingy alley that is ready to be in the next Dark Knight. I glance about, seeing nothing other than a few shops and run down businesses.

"Where exactly is here?" I inquire, cocking a brow at the two then take a step back when Blondie moves my way. She frowns then steps forward again while I take another back.

"He don't seem to like me much," she giggles.

"Brilliant deduction," I hiss, which earns me a snort from Mop Head and an offended gasp from the girl. I'm honestly shocked and frightened when she suddenly pulls a switchblade from her jacket pocket.

What the hell? Is she insane?!

"What's that supposed to mean?" She growls, pointing it at me challengingly.

"Easy now. You can't expect him to like us, Sugar. Don't worry, he'll make it up to you, right?" Mop Head looks at me with a grin that I don't return.

Thankfully though, his words worked because Blondie is grumbling to herself when she puts the blade away, allowing me to take a much needed breath. They're all even crazier than I thought. What have I gotten myself into?

"See that shop over there?" Mop Head points to the convenience store at the end of the street. "Head on over and take the cash out of the register."

"Huh?" I ask, staring at Mop Head in confusion.

"You heard me. Do your little freak show and get us the cash."

"How am I supposed to open the register?"

"The dumbass keeps a key for the damn thing right next to it, thinks no one will mess with 'er cause she carries."

They must have scoped the place out earlier so I try to think of another excuse.

"Don't you think she will find it a bit odd for the register to just open? Besides, I can't turn what I touch invisible," I lie through my teeth only to immediately regret it.

I shout in shock when something cold and sharp grazes my arm. Jumping back, I find Blondie with her blade out again, a trace amount of blood now dripping from it. My arm stings and I look down to find a cut on my arm. It isn't deep, but that's because it was a warning.

"Don't you lie to us," she says with a hiss. "We know you can, so get your ass over there and bring us the cash."

"But the cashier and the camera's—"

"Figure it out!" She shoves me with all her might into the opposing wall. I'm shocked she even has the strength to do it, then again, my body is shivering with fear. I'm not sure what I expected, but either way, I wasn't prepared. I'm still not.

Rubbing the back of my now throbbing head, I give them one last glance. Blondie is ready to boil over while Mop Head is leaning leisurely against the wall with a grin. I really can't get out of this. With a shaky breath, I close my eyes and disappear, which earns a squeal from Blondie and an impressed whistle from Mop Head.

"Now don't go thinking about sneaking off. You know what will happen if you do," he says. To make it worse, Blondie swings her blade from side to side in a taunting manner. It sends a shiver down my spine.

Rather than respond, I step out onto the street and head for the convenience store. To say my gut is twisting would be a lie. I'm about to explode into Micah stew (which I am certain would not taste good) when the doors open. The cashier stares in disbelief since, to her, there's no one there. My mind is reeling, body humming and stomach churning. It's getting hard to breathe but I haven't got a choice. I keep telling myself that in hopes to go through with it.

Following a customer, I wait until they get a little too close to a stand of pop cans before pushing the entire thing over. It all tumbles to the floor in a loud crash, some

even exploding on impact. There's a total mess. The customer shouts in shock then quickly apologizes, believing they did it while the cashier runs to help. I'm ready to vomit when I bolt around the counter, finding the keys right next to the register like Mop Head said, along with a shotgun beneath the counter. My blood runs cold and my fingers shake. The keys are jingling in my hands. I hiss to myself like I think that will keep it quiet. Luckily, no one hears it nor the opening of the register. Seeing the money sitting there, I feel ready to pass out.

I don't want to do this. The next thing they're going to want me to do is probably rob a damn bank!

But, when I hear the cashier putting everything back up, I know I don't have the time to think. I grab the cash, shove it in my pocket and run out the door without so much as a glance back.

Blondie and Mop Head are very pleased with the $189 dollars I hand over. So much so that Mop Head slings his arm around my shoulder. He smells of cigarettes and week old lunch meat. It takes everything in me not to gag or ask him to take a bath. Actually, I don't think that would work either. He's probably rotting on the inside.

"Nice work, kiddo. Honestly, we weren't all that sure you'd pull it off!" He smacks me across the cheek with the money. Blondie is smelling hers like the weirdo that she is. "We're all going to make quite the team."

"We're not a team," I growl, biting my lip when Mop Head's grip tightens on my shoulder. Feeling his breath against my face makes my skin crawl, but I refuse to turn away, glaring at him with all the hatred I can muster. It causes him to snort.

"Whether you like it or not, you just robbed someone."

"I didn't have a choice."

"Doesn't change a damn thing because, no matter how much you tell yourself that, it won't help you sleep at night."

My gut twists because I know that's true.

"No worries though, that's all we have for you to do today, don't wanna spook ya too much." He shoves me away with an amused cackle. "Head on home, Freak! We'll be in touch real soon."

"Real, real soon!" Blondie squeals, the two of them leaving without another word.

When the two are finally out of sight, reality hits me.

"Damn it," I groan, pressing my back to the alley wall. My legs give out without my consent, sending me straight to ground. I proceed to kick my legs like a toddler, too frustrated to do anything else. "Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

I just robbed a store.

The people that I've always fought against are making me do exactly what I stop them from doing. There's no telling what else they'll try to make me do. There's no telling when I'll get out of this either.

Is this karma? This is what I get for trying to be something I'm not; a hero.

~

Oh no, Micah is paranoid about this whole dilemma and now he has officially robbed a store! What do you guys think of that? How will it affect Micah? What else will they have him do? =O

Chapter 9

The bus ride home is dead silent although the world is boisterous around me. My eyes are so focused ahead that I don't see a thing, and would have missed my stop if someone else hadn't got off first. Slowly, I make my way off the bus, lingering there on the street with my hands in my pockets and head bowed.

I just robbed a store.

I'm being forced to commit crimes while some freaks are stalking my loved ones all because I was stupid enough to think I could be the hero. This is the consequence of my ridiculous actions. It isn't just me that could lose everything.

I'm going to throw up.

Rushing over to a nearby bush, I do exactly that. All the contents of my stomach is upchucked in a second leaving my throat sore and mouth tasting of, well, puke. Groaning, I stand up, run my fingers frustratingly through my hair then kick at the sidewalk.

"Calm down, Micah, calm down," I speak in whispers to myself while walking home. Sure enough, the car is there, sitting along the street. It even flashes its lights at me in the form of a taunt that has me growling.

I need to get out of this mess. Fast.

"Micah, how'd tutoring go?" Mom asks when I step through the door. She frowns upon seeing me though. "Is something wrong?"

"Feel sick to my stomach," I answer, which isn't a lie at all so, technically, I'm not a complete sack of garbage. "I'm probably gonna go to bed early."

"Ah, ok, do you want me to make you anything?"

"No thanks."

I grab a glass from the kitchen, get some water, then disappear up the steps. Mom is probably worried and I feel bad for it, but there's nothing she can do right now. This is something I have to handle on my own. I'm not going to put her, or anyone for that matter, in anymore danger.

Think. I have to think. The three buffoons I have met are exactly that, buffoons. Judging purely on what they are making me do accompanied by how they are going about it, I think it's safe to say they're in some sort of gang, have definitely partaken in illegal actions before. No, I know that they have. I caught Clover in the act and I know I've seen Blondie before. Now the question is, if that is the case, why have I only met three? Is it because there are only three or they want me to think there are only three?

I peek out of my curtains to inspect the car down the street. They're smart enough to have tinted windows but I doubt the car is filled with people, probably two max. I've still only seen the two vehicles thus far. Clover wasn't with us today, but one was surely tailing Mom. Was it him? Are they taking turns?

Sadly, only time will tell. I have to put up with this a while longer and try to learn their movements so, rather than sleep, I stay up through the night. Coffee has never been something I enjoyed, but one wouldn't be able to tell by the way I'm inhaling it like oxygen. I'm literally vibrating on my bed.

The sound of cars lessen in the evening until, eventually, every sound of an engine has me sneaking a peek out the window. It isn't until almost 4am that another vehicle pulls up, different from the other two. Blondie steps out of the new car while, as I thought, Clover steps out of the old one. They switch and the car drives off. I'm certain that this operation is a small one, otherwise, they wouldn't be switching with each other like this. That's good to know.

Before I realize it, my alarm is going off. It's no use. I'm already awake. My eyes feel heavy, but I can't fall asleep. My body is restless, continuously twitching even when I try pacing my room. There's no point staying home. It won't make me feel better so, even after mom suggests I take the day off, I head to school. Beckett and Misty are concerned when they see me, understandably so. I both look and feel like shit.

"Did you get any sleep last night?" Beckett asks when I leisurely take a book from my locker. Ah, it's the wrong one so I put it back and grab another. Yep, that's wrong too. What book am I getting again?

"No," I grunt.

"Why didn't you stay home?"

"Didn't want to."

"Something really is wrong," Misty whispers to Beckett, but seriously, she knows she can't whisper. Neither of them can, birds of a feather flock together. Wait, then what

does that make me? Misty presses her hand to my shoulder then asks, "Did anything happen with Leo?"

"No, what makes you say—" Shit. Leo.

My eyes grow wide when I suddenly remember that I was supposed to text him when I got home. I ruffle my hair in frustration causing Beckett and Misty to stare at me with evident confusion and worry in their eyes. Groaning, I pull out my phone to find no messages from him. Damn, he probably thinks I didn't want to talk. Well, this week is getting better and better, isn't it?!

"Seriously, what's wrong, Micah?" Beckett asks, but I'm already walking away, texting Leo as I do. It isn't a good idea. My head is down, I'm not paying attention so obviously that means I have to run into someone. With a grunt, I stumble back and look at who I just hit to find Rolland glaring back at me. Terrific. This is exactly what I need.

"You should watch where you're going," Rolland says with a cocked brow. I don't respond, choosing to walk around the ogre, which obviously doesn't work. He grabs me by the arm to pull me back, even tosses me into the locker.

I'm really not in the mood for this.

"Not only did you run into me, but you aren't apologizing for it?" Rolland asks, pushing me roughly next. "You're asking for a beating."

"Touch me again, Rolland, and I'm going to break your jaw."

A few of Rolland's goons snicker at my threat while Rolland full on laughs. Not that I blame them, this isn't something I've ever said to them before. Rolland is the type of guy I avoid, but he's about to learn how bad it is to be a cocky little shit all the time.

"Ah, he didn't mean that, Rolland!" Beckett quickly jumps in, grabbing my arm in hopes to pull me away. I brush it off then push Beckett back. He's frowning, even silently pleading with me, but I'm not really myself right now. I'm angry. I'm annoyed. I'm tired. Rolland just chose the wrong day to push my buttons.

"Oh, I know he didn't mean it. Like this twig could do that," Rolland cackles then makes the mistake of doing exactly what I warned him not to. He grabs my shoulder.

My fist connects with his jaw in a second. The resounding smack shocks everyone enough to simply stare while Rolland stumbles back, clutching his already reddening

jaw. His eyes narrow on me when he realizes what I've done before growling and running at me. I grunt when he body slams me into the locker.

Quickly, I bring my elbow down continuously into his back until he pulls away. As soon as he does, I tackle him to the ground, desperately throwing punches at his stupid face. Not gonna lie, it feels good to teach him a lesson, not so much when one of his friends decks me in the side of the head though.

The shock forces me to the floor just as teachers come running over to break up the fight. We're all ripped apart from each other with Rolland shouting curse words at me that I only snort at. The other students are told to return to class while Rolland and I are obviously sent to the principal's office where he goes on and on about how I started it. Not that it really matters, we both get after school detention for the rest of the week anyways.

That could be a good thing, an excuse to give those whack jobs as to why I can't go along with their stupid schemes. At the same time, they'll probably tell me to skip and I'll get into even more trouble. I'm tempted to ask if this day can get any worse, but I know that will only jinx myself so I'm not even going to think about it.

Once we leave the principal's office and are returned to class, I immediately take my phone back out when the teacher isn't looking. Beckett seems like he wants to talk to me, but when he sees me texting he keeps quiet. I'm quick to send a message to Leo, apologizing for not texting last night. Again, it's not a complete lie when I say I wasn't feeling good, but I do feel bad for having to keep the real reason secret. Leo is quick to respond.

Leo: Are you feeling ok? Are you at home? I can bring you something after school if you need it.

Micah: No, I'm at school, feeling fine now.

Leo: You should have stayed home. What if you get sick again?

Micah: Guess you'll have to take me home if that happens.

Leo: I definitely will if you need me to, you know that, right?

Damn it, he's adorable. At least this is making me feel better. Finally seems like I can breathe again. A smile comes to my face, so big that it hurts. Beckett is smiling too, which has me eyeing him suspiciously, waiting for teasing that never comes. He shrugs

and acts like he doesn't notice the grin on my face, but hey, what can I say, he's a terrible actor.

I'm surprised, but certainly not unhappy about texting Leo throughout the remainder of the day. We don't share classes together since he's an overachiever and sits in all the AP courses while I am a normie. Too much work to put into AP courses so I rather not. Beckett and Misty, surprisingly, say nothing about the texting. I am assuming it has to do with my obviously bad attitude earlier, that Leo is now helping.

The moment I leave school though, that good mood will be gone. I try not to linger on it and continue my day until the after school detention. Leo isn't happy when I tell him about Rolland, even claiming that he'll "finish" the fight the next time he sees him. Can't lie that I find him very attractive but I tell him there is no need. I rather do it myself anyways.

Throughout my detention all I can think about is what's going to happen next. When I get home, will there be someone there waiting for me? I can only hope that by staying here it doesn't make them think I'm up to something. I mean, there has been that stupid car outside the school before. I haven't seen it today, but they probably know I'm here for a reason. I don't know, but it makes me so paranoid that I actually knock the desk over when I abruptly stand at the sound of being excused.

The teacher stares at me funny, says nothing when I sit the desk back up, then bolt fast enough out of class that I'd give The Flash a run for his money. Once at the bus stop, I hop on and sit there with jittery legs until I get home. I'm not sure what I expect when I run up to the house, but it doesn't look different. There's no one outside on the porch, that stupid car is there, but no one is stepping out. Mom's car is in the driveway and the lights are on.

I let out a heavy sigh of relief. That relief is completely shattered after I get to my room. I completely run past Mom, don't want her seeing the bruise forming on the side of my face so, after opening the door to my room, something feels off. The air has a warmth to it, like the AC isn't working that good, and it's then that I notice my window.

It's slightly open.

My heart races when I quickly shut my door and rush over to said window. The curtains are moving from the natural airflow coming in. Looking out, I see no one. My skin breaks out with goosebumps. I latch the window shut then spin around to inspect my room. I fling open the closet door to peer inside then under my bed. When I'm about to run out of the room, I notice a piece of paper on my desk.

The handwriting is familiar and I know who it is instantly. It's another address with instructions to meet there tonight at eleven. These jerks want me to sneak out? Fantastic.

I crumble the note in my grasp. My arms are shaking. I bite my lip so hard it bleeds because that asshole, he was in my house. He broke in. He broke into my home, my mom's home. Was she here? Did he almost come in contact with her? Did he go in anywhere else, or worse, is he still here? There's no way, right? He left his stupid note, obviously I'll be there so...

I end up checking every room upstairs. There's no sign of him taking anything or having ever left my room but it frustrates me off nonetheless. I need some fresh air so I inform Mom that I'm gonna sit out on the back porch for a bit, rather not be in the front where those freaks can see me. I want to sit outside, in peace.

Thankfully Mom's being her crazy cooking self in the kitchen, guess that's a good thing about having a professional cook as a mother. She makes great food all the time and it's easier to sneak out the front door when she's in the kitchen.

The sun is low and the air is warm when I take a seat on the porch steps. Mom has a rose bush planted in the backyard as well as some other type of blue flower that I don't know the name of. Other than that, there's nothing there, used to be a trampoline, but I threw a brick at Beckett once for annoying me and tore a hole in it so that's gone.

"That's a nasty bruise," Leo says causing me to look over and find him walking from his yard to mine. He waves hesitantly, like he isn't sure I want him there. When I make no move to tell him to leave, he smiles and takes a seat next to me. "Does it hurt?"

"Sometimes," I answer. "I'm just angry I didn't get him back. It was one of Rolland's goons."

"Why'd you punch him anyways?"

"He's a piece of shit."

"No argument there, but you've never messed with him."

"He picked the wrong day to piss me off." I shrug, which has Leo eying me suspiciously.

"Why's that? Is something wrong?" He suddenly presses the back of his hand to my forehead. My eyes go wide while my heart starts thinking it's ok to sing. It isn't so shut up.

"You don't feel warm," he says softly.

"I'm not sick."

Leo drops his hand to his side with a smile. "That's good, but is there something else? Ah, I'm sorry i-if I'm overstepping my boundaries. I just, you helped me so I thought—"

"It's fine," I interrupt before the poor boy sputters himself into pure gibberish, not that I don't find it completely adorable, but he probably doesn't enjoy it as much. "It's not that anything is really wrong, just one of those days, know what I mean?"

That is a complete lie. Yes, it sucks to lie, but I'm definitely not telling Leo. Especially when he's looking at me with those big blue eyes of his that make my stomach swirl like a bad smoothie in an overpowered blender. Yeah, it's best to keep this to myself, keep them out of as much trouble as I can while hoping that I don't get caught. I'm going to have to start writing down all the lies to keep track of them. This is way too much work.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"I don't know, is there?" I ask in a, I swear it wasn't meant to be but it definitely was, flirtatious tone.

Now Leo is staring at me with such wide eyes he looks like a deer caught in headlights. I shouldn't be digging a deeper grave for myself, but screw it, these whack jobs may end up killing me so I might as well go all out here.

Pressing my hand into the porch, I lean over so that I completely shatter Leo's personal bubble. I am grateful for the thin stairway, the railing forces Leo to stay in place rather than lean away, although he's not even trying to. He ends up going a little cross eyed for a moment when my nose brushes his. Suddenly, it's a thousand degrees outside. My heartbeat is jumping to the rhythm of an unknown beat, or maybe that's Leo's.

Rather than moving any closer, I wait patiently for a move from him. Leo can either push me away, lean in, or give me some sort of sign that this is an ok move. I actually don't have the time to grow impatient because only a second passes before Leo's eyes flutter shut. His shoulders relax, cheeks flush, and he sits there, simply sits there waiting. Who am I to pass up such an offer?

Leaning forward, I can feel his warm breath against my lips when Mom suddenly opens the door.

"Micah, it's time to—oh!"

There is pure unbridled and unexplainable burning rage in my eyes when I jerk my head to the side to glare a thousand painful deaths at my mom. Leo's eyes are wide open as well, face red up to his ears while he quickly turns away. His shoulder hits my chest, forcing me to back up so that the moment is not only completely ruined, but also frozen over and sunk into the deepest depths of the sea.

"I, uh, I made cookies, w-would either of you...?" Mom snaps her mouth shut when she sees me pinching the bridge of my nose.

Why, Mom? Why?

"I'll just go inside," she laughs nervously, quickly shutting the door behind her. The moment she does Leo is standing and I am well aware that no kissing will ensue. Pity, I was so close!

"Uh, I should get g-going. I'll s-see you later," Leo squeaks, rushing down the stairs and tripping a bit in the grass. He doesn't look back at me when he says bye, waving his hand before running like the hounds of hell are hot on his trail.

And here I thought I might get a nice kiss before my death, a little Romeo and Juliet action, Romeo and...James action? I don't know what I'm thinking anymore. The point is, Mom and her stupid cookies ruined it. I never thought the day would come when I was angry or did not want cookies. This is blasphemous.

Grumbling angrily to myself, I get up, brush off my pants and stomp inside. Mom is waiting right there with such a wide grin that it physically hurts to look at.

"Was that what I think it was?" She giggles. "Oh, please, please let Leo be my future son in law!"

"You ruined those chances."

"Micah! How was I supposed to know? And—" Mom stops when she finally gets a good look at me. "Hey, where did you get that bruise?"

"I'm too angry with you right now to answer."

"Micah! Hey, don't ignore me!"

I definitely ignore her. I'm angry. She ruined the moment. At least it distracted me for a little bit. Not enough though because the night drags on with me resting on my bed,

staring at the ceiling with a million and one different scenarios of how tonight, or the next few, will go running through my head. Each ends worse than the last.

~

***sigh* Mom ruined the moment. But oh crap, someone broke into Micah's house =O How the hell is he gonna get out of this mess?**

Chapter 10

Sneaking out of the house around 10:30 at night isn't what I wish to be doing with my time yet, here I am. Mom is already asleep, tends to pass out between ten and eleven. I was lucky in this instance since she clocked out at ten. She doesn't hear me walk out the front door.

It's still warm outside yet my body is shaking from the nonexistent cold. The bus stop has a single street light hanging above it allowing the bus driver to see me sitting there anxiously. When the door opens it has a unique scent that I swear buses only have at night. My nose crinkles in disgust when I get on and take a seat far from the two hooded figures at the back of the bus. Luckily, they get off long before I do.

The area we're meant to meet is pretty close to the last one. I'm assuming they live and hang out there, or have found it to be a better place for their shenanigans. Not the nicest part of town, obviously, so I keep my gaze low while making sure to watch and listen for anything suspicious. The last thing I need is to get jumped by some idiot. I have it bad enough already.

Doesn't take me long to find the designated meet up, but I'm a bit confused to find an apartment building with Clover standing outside leaning against the brick. There's also a new face standing at his side, oh joy. Unlike Mophead, this guy has a buzz cut with narrowed eyes and two silver hoops in his left eyebrow, which raises upon seeing me.

"Got caught up at school today, huh?" Clover asks with a sneer that remains that way even when I growl at him.

"Why did you break into my house?"

"Had to get you the note somehow, didn't I?"

"Don't step in my house again."

"Or what?" Clover hums while pushing himself from the wall. He takes a step towards me, pressing his finger roughly into my chest with every word. "Whatcha gonna do 'bout it?"

I'll make him regret it, but I keep that to myself.

Rolling my eyes, I grumble, "I have after school detention the rest of the week."

Clover snorts.

"If you want to talk to me then tell me what stupid shit you'll have me do now. I don't want you in my house again."

My gaze turns to the unfamiliar face that has yet to speak. In doing so, I notice that he's a bit more well kept than Clover and the others. His jeans aren't dirty or ripped up but seem to actually fit, as well as the nice leather jacket he's wearing. Actually, the guy must be rich, or a really good thief, because it looks like he's wearing a Rolex. Bet it's fake, or stolen, or both.

"C'mon we have things to discuss," Clover says while gripping my shoulder roughly and shoving me inside. The stranger follows without a word.

The complex is as disgusting on the inside as it is on the out. Clearly the landlords no longer care since the floors are a disgusting shade of yellow, although I'm pretty sure they were once white. The paint has chipped from the walls and railings. The elevator doesn't even work so I'm made to walk six flights of stairs to the rooftop. I'm a bit confused, thinking we can't get out, but all Clover does is pull out a credit card and slide it through the crack of the door. With a click, it swings open.

My stomach drops when I start to think maybe they no longer want to bother with me. Am I about to be pushed off a building? Because that's what this scenario seems like. If only my super power was to fly!

Clover takes a deep breath once on the rooftop then holds out his arms. "What a view."

I don't respond to that, unsure if it's even meant for me. Seems it isn't judging by the new guy's sudden sigh followed by an impatient question, "Why am I here?"

"I told ya why, to meet the freak." Clover points to me with a wide grin. He walks over and throws his arm around my shoulders. I grit my teeth when he does, averting my gaze in disgust. "This kid already helped us rob a convenience store in less than three minutes."

"Uh huh."

"And that—is our next target."

Clover points to the right side of the building causing myself and the stranger to look. Through the many buildings there is one that stands out just a few blocks away. I can see the bank logo from here glistening like a giant target. Wow, could they be anymore

obvious? I guessed a bank heist earlier, but these idiots are actually going for it? They should be more original. Regardless of their obvious and unoriginal ways, it doesn't mean it makes me more comfortable with it. If my stomach could drop anymore, it would. I'm at the ultimate low now.

"Clarity Bank? You're joking," Stranger says after an amused chuckle. "I've never even seen this kid around before. How is he going to rob a heavily guarded bank that's not even in our area? If the Boss finds out, he's going to have your head."

Not their area? Boss? Yep, this is a gang, and now I'm affiliated with them. My life has turned into a bad drama that'll be cut after season one. However, I'm taking a guess that Stranger is farther up the pecking order than Clover and, for whatever reason, Clover trusts him enough to say this. That also means I was right to assume it's a small job, am I meant to rob this bank and prove Clover to be a good...bad guy, or something?

"He isn't goin' to find out because this brat won't even be seen." Clover suddenly slaps me on the back. I glare at him for it before he hisses, "Do it. Now."

Since I have no other options, I do as I'm told. Clover makes sure to keep his hand on my shoulder when I vanish. It isn't the least bit surprising to see the wide eyed expression of Stranger nor hear Clover's amused cackle. Again, he starts smacking me and I grunt after each hit.

"This is some kind of trick, isn't it? Did you slip something in my drink earlier?" Stranger asks while stepping back. He even starts looking around as if he expects to find some projector or something.

"No trick, this freak is the real deal! Don't know how or why, but it works, perfect to slip in and out, no problem!"

I'm terribly annoyed when Stranger becomes more curious than shocked. He reaches out and manages to poke me in the chest. I smack his hand away causing him to jump back. His eyes are looking right at me, but can't see me at all until, finally, I reappear. Again, he jumps then stares at me in stunned silence; wide-eyed and slack jawed.

"Well, what do ya think? You in?" Clover asks.

"This is crazy."

"Crazy good. Imagine what we could have 'im do!"

"The kid doesn't exactly look keen with this," he says, which has me nodding. If these two are friends, I doubt this jerk has a conscience either, but I'm not going to pretend to be ok with this.

"Who cares?!"

"I do, what if he rats us out?"

"He won't, will ya, Micah?" Clover purrs my name causing me to shiver and attempt to step away, but he keeps his hold on my shoulder. "His mom's real cute."

"Shut the hell up," I hiss, which only makes him laugh.

"Got our eyes on his best friends, and his boyfriend."

"I said shut the hell up!"

Clover suddenly takes hold of the back of my neck. I groan when he squeezes so hard that my neck throbs. With a single push, I drop to my knees while he holds me in place and growls, "Keep quiet."

Oh, I have no desire to do so, but know it's best to comply.

Nodding, I remain on my knees when Stranger suddenly says, "Let's chat a minute. Come over here."

Clover slaps me over the back of the head. They're on the other side of the roof whispering to one another while I stand up and dust the dirt from my jeans. I can't really hear what they're talking about, only the occasional word here or there. Something about me, the robbery, Boss, and keeping a low profile. That piques my interest, makes it sound like even this guy doesn't plan to tell their "Boss." So long as this plan remains between a few people, I might be able to get out of this.

After a few minutes, the two return with Clover smiling from ear to ear. He reaches into the front pocket of his hoodie to pull out another piece of paper that he hands to me and says with excitement, "We're meeting up here everyday after your detention."

He snickers again at the mention of it. I roll my eyes then open it to discover it's an abandoned warehouse...near where I used to practice all the time. They really were following me, either they scoped the places out before and found a good spot to meet up or they were already there.

Sighing, I nod, slip the paper into my back pocket then ask, "Are you going to tell me who this is?"

"Hell no," Stranger answers for him with a scowl. "The less you know the better."

"Yet you guys know so much about me without even having asked if you could."

"Guess you shouldn't have tried being the hero." He flicks me in the head with a chuckle then looks to Clover. "I'll see you around."

With that, Stranger leaves without another word, disappearing through the door and into the complex. That leaves Clover and I alone, which isn't something I ever want. I don't care if my glaring bothers him because if he expects me not to then he's an idiot.

"Hey, don't look at me like that," Clover says. "Listen up, if ya play nice, maybe we'll give ya part of the cut."

"I don't want any."

"Oh, I bet you'll be changin' your mind once ya see inside."

"I bet I won't."

Clover doesn't seem to care about my attitude at the moment. Instead, he shrugs it off then gestures for me to follow. We walk down the steps together, six flights all over again, and are about to walk out the front door when voices are heard outside. Suddenly, Clover shoves me away from the door and, to my shock, holds a blade to my throat. I stand there with my back pressed against the cold wall, trying to push as far away from the blade as I can. The cool metal can still be felt against my throat. The shock is so sudden that I can't think of anything. My mind goes blank as a fresh piece of canvas.

"Don't say a word," he whispers to me with a narrowed gaze. Not gonna be a problem. The voices grow closer, sounds like a decent sized group. Some of the voices are slurred, probably a few drunks, but Clover appears stressed. His shoulders are tense when they can be heard right outside the complex.

"I think you had enough to drink tonight, Denny."

"No! I'm fuckin' pissed! You know, why can't people just give up their cash when we ask?" The so-called Denny responds in a heavily slurred voice. "Sure, I don't mind beatin' them till they hand over their debt, but that old geezer got blood all over my new suit!"

"Oh no, your new suit, how awful," another cackles.

"Oi, I worked my way up the line to get the money to afford a suit so you shut your mouth!"

I hear a loud smack followed by a string of curse words, but the voices quickly drift into the distance. When their footsteps and voices can no longer be heard, Clover finally lets up. I take a deep breath, only now realizing that I was holding it. My lungs scream at me in pain for doing so.

"What the hell was that about?" I hiss barely above a whisper.

Clover points the blade at me in warning. "Did I say you could talk again?"

Someone's in a foul mood. but I don't ask why for obvious reasons. Clover looks out the door and swings his head from side to side. No one must be there because he grabs me by the arm and says, "Go home and keep out of sight on the way there."

Suddenly, his eyes go wide before he starts to chuckle. I don't get what for until he spits out, "Guess I could have told ya to disappear a second ago. Must have slipped my mind."

I growl. This guy really is an idiot. Am I sure that murder isn't worth it? I'm really leaning towards it.

Rather than argue though, I disappear and Clover knows that I leave when the door opens and swings shut behind me. He didn't have to instruct me to be sneaky about it, I would have done that on my own. This neighborhood isn't one that people wish to be caught in alone, especially at night, so I remain hidden until I get close to the bus stop.

There's time to think while waiting, even more on the ride home. I've got new information that could do me a lot of good. They are definitely some sort of gang, the bank isn't in their "territory" and Clover, along with his pals, are probably low in the pecking order. The stranger is higher, but trusted among them. They really don't want to be caught by this Boss of theirs or anyone else in the gang. I'm assuming those drunks outside were part of it, or maybe even the opposing side?

Either way, my identity really isn't known by too many others. Clover is keeping this pretty secret, which gives me the advantage. The real question is, how many people are left in the scheme? If they plan to have me rob a bank, I will likely meet them, so come tomorrow, hopefully I'll have the last pieces of information.

Sneaking back inside once home is simple. Mom is clearly still fast asleep and, after I'm in the door, it's easy to say I haven't gone to sleep yet. It makes me feel a bit more at ease. After kicking off my shoes, I head upstairs to take a steaming hot shower in hopes to erase the feeling of Clover's arm around my shoulders. Just thinking about it gives me the shivers. I hate that he's near me, let alone actually touches me. I can't wait to rip their plan to shreds and see the look of shock and disappointment on their stupid faces, plus a few bruises and a bloody nose. The pain in my knuckles will be so sweet.

Thinking about it does make me feel better causing me to head to my room clean and with a smile on my face. It isn't until I'm changed into shorts and laying on my bed that I finally check my phone. There's a few messages from Beckett and Misty just asking how I'm feeling and such, which I briefly respond to that I'm fine. I would tell you guys the truth if I could, seriously. But I'm in search of a message in particular, Leo's, but there isn't one. I can't lie and say I'm not a bit disappointed. At the same time, I'm not surprised. After earlier, he's probably shy. He always is and, yes, I find that absolutely adorable so, guess I have to act first.

Micah: You asleep?

The message has been read but not answered. I grin.

Micah: Take that as a no.

I'm totally not grinning from ear to ear when he replies;

Leo: Can't fall asleep.

Micah: Why not?

Leo: I think you know why.

Micah: Because of me? I'm flattered.

Leo: I don't know how to respond to that so I'm gonna ignore it. Is Saturday ok for us to go to the zoo?

Micah: Yep.

Leo: Cool, then, can I ask you something?

I'm not sure what he wants to ask me about, makes me a little nervous but I answer;

Micah: You just did.

Leo: Micah.

I swear I can hear the sigh in Leo's voice.

Micah: Go ahead.

Leo: Are you counting Saturday as a date?

Have I mentioned how adorable this piece of shit is lately? Because he is, and it's going to be the end of me, well Clover and his dumb plans might do that first, but if they weren't around then it'd be Leo! I should have flirted with the hot soccer boy next door sooner. What have I been doing all these years? Micah, you fool.

So, with a soft smile, I don't hesitate to answer;

Micah: Definitely.

Once more I'm left on read for a few moments, not that I expected anything different. I wish this was like one of those cheesy teen flicks where I can look out my window and see into Leo's room. Maybe we could smile, write notes on large pieces of paper and sneak peeks of each other undressing because that isn't totally creepy.

Still, right now I can imagine him blushing a fiery red. Oh, how I wish to see it in person, but alas, this isn't a movie and his room is not directly across from mine. It sucks. After a few moments of silence, Leo finally replies;

Leo: Me too. Goodnight, Micah.

If it were anyone else I'd feel a bit bad about him suddenly going to sleep, but I think it's safe to say he's about to drop dead with embarrassment. I don't have to see him in order to know that.

Micah: Sweet dreams, Leo.

Once I see that my message has been read, I set my phone aside and lean back in bed. There's no time to think about anything because, oddly enough, I fall straight to sleep. Leo is to thank for that, I'm sure.

~

N'aw, at least there's some cute! But uh oh, another person knows Micah's secret! Do you actually think he's going to rob a bank or can he get out of this before it's

too late?

Chapter 11

It's crazy how such awful and amazing things are happening at the exact same time. Here I am, sitting in class with my phone hidden in my lap. I've been texting Leo almost all day and, yeah, about twenty five percent of the conversation is flirting. I've tried bumping it up, but Leo gets a little too embarrassed after so much and I have to tone it down. That's fine, I'll get him used to it eventually.

Beckett and Misty have not been directly told about this, but judging by their smiling faces at lunch, they know something is up. Both are easily ignored but neither actually bother me much. I think it has to do with the fact that I'm still in a bit of a bad mood from time to time for obvious reasons, not to them of course.

Seriously, why did all this with Leo have to happen now? I want to be happy about this, but with what's going on it's hard to just stay that way. I can't really think about the whole robbery thing since we aren't all meeting until tonight. I pray to whoever is willing to listen that I see everyone involved. I need to get out of this mess before Saturday.

I have priorities and my priority right now is having a successful date Saturday. This stupid bank heist is messing it up! Who even has to think like that? Whatever being put me in the Twilight Zone, please, send me home.

"You can't hang out tonight either?" Beckett groans after requesting that he pick me up after detention. "Why not?"

I shake my head in the negative. "Busy."

"With Leo?"

"None of your business."

Beckett grins, informing me that he thinks it has to do with Leo, which is a complete lie. It's better he thinks that on his own though since, technically, I'm not lying. He's lying to himself. I'm going to keep saying that to make me feel better. Thankfully, Beckett doesn't ask anything more, only claims that I have to tell him about any "new details" with Leo. I wave him off then head to my detention, which is as boring as the first, but I much rather be here than where I'm meant to go afterwards.

It's easy to get to the requested destination. I know exactly where it is, have taken routes close to it before so have no issue getting there. However, I feel more uncomfortable than ever, even more so when I slip through the gates surrounding the closed off area to some old warehouse. It's rather similar to the one I use. There are other abandoned buildings or just run down apartments around. Doesn't seem to be any security cameras either, this place is pretty dead. I've seen a cop or two pass by through the streets patrolling, but other than that, nothing. It's perfect for a meet up for their stupid schemes. I hate it.

They are definitely already here. I find one of the side doors has been unlocked. One of them must have picked the lock because the door swings open. Inside is a single open massive room with huge beams supporting the building. There seems to be a general office in the back with stairs that lead to a second above it, but other than that, there's nothing else. Garbage is scattered all over, as well as rat feces. Wow, ain't this a five star hotel. There's a smell of rotting food accompanied with just stale air. I cover my nose and head towards the table that's been set up on the other side. There's also a whiteboard. Wow, they can write?

Mop Head, Blondie, Clover, and Stranger are all standing around the table. Each is watching me walk over.

"This place look familiar?" Blondie asks with a giggle. "We saw you in a place like it before."

I don't bother answering her.

"As moody as ever, aren't ya?"

"Leave the kid be," Mop Head says. He swings his arms around Blondie, holding her to his chest. "It's ok if he doesn't like us. We don't need him to in order to get the job done."

Blondie purses her lips when nodding. I turn my gaze to the white board once I know the psycho over there won't try to cut me again. There's a surprising amount of information written across it, such as time schedules for the tellers, security, even when the bank has the most money out. On the right side there's a map of a few city blocks drawn out with three separate colored lines through the streets, likely escape routes is the only thing I can guess. I'm shocked they have done so much, but looking at Stranger, I get the feeling he has done the most work even if he's only been on board for a single day.

"Now that you're here, we can clue ya in on our plan so far. Don't worry though, there isn't much you need to actually do other than steal the cash," Clover says like it's no big

deal and we aren't a bunch of thieves in a warehouse plotting a heist. This movie has the worst plot ever. I'd leave the theater if I were watching it.

Clover proceeds to explain that the issue isn't getting me in, but has to do with me getting out. There are cameras inside the vault, will be kind of obvious something is very wrong when the money suddenly starts moving on its own. I am beyond shocked to learn that Mop Head is good at hacking. He catches me giving him a surprised stare then sends me a wink that has me grimacing. Guess it's his job to turn the camera's off so I can shove as much as I can in the bags, get out to the car then run back in to get as much as I can.

They claim Stranger will be watching my mom that day. Clover and Blondie are the ones that will actually be near the bank with me as sort of "look outs." I hate the thought of it, but they're going over in detail their options, hell, they have four separate ones in case one doesn't work. They're prepared, but as they're going over that, I can't help but wonder, who's the driver?

Mop Head is meant to be keeping a watch on the security system, I take the money, the others are getting me in, so there has to be a designated driver. Damn, that means someone else is involved. Either they couldn't make it, or Clover is smarter than I give him credit for, making sure I don't meet them all until the very last moment.

After that, Blondie rolls out one of the sheets on the table. It's a blueprint of the bank. How they got their hands on it, I don't know, but it's insane. She goes over all the exits that I can take, which would be quickest and what's a good second option if we don't get finished by the time workers start coming in. Sitting here hearing all this is making me ill. It's really hammering it in that they want me to rob a bank.

No, we're going to rob a bank unless I stop them.

"Saturday."

"Huh?" I stare at Clover after hearing the day we're meant to perform the heist.

"Saturday mornin'. In Clarity's case, there's a lot of full time workers that can't make it in to cash their checks durin' the week so Saturday mornin's are their busiest time. They have the most cash on site. We get the freak in before they open, he snags the cash, and we get the hell out of there."

But it can't be Saturday. I'm meeting up with Leo on Saturday.

Obviously I don't voice this because they won't care nor do I want them to know, but now I'm even more motivated to finish this. There's no way I'm robbing that bank. Before the end of the week, I'll be out of this mess and Saturday I'm going to the zoo with Leo. No more of these shit heads, no more looking over my shoulder, I'm getting this done.

"We are meeting back up everyday to go over this. I don't care if it bores ya, we aren't screwin' this up, got it?" Clover looks around the table to all of us, but he lingers the longest on me. I roll my shoulders and look away. "Good, now get the hell outta 'ere."

I am more than happy to do that, quickly scurrying out of the warehouse before any of these nutjobs can get their hands on me. I'm on the bus in no time, heading home with every intention to lock myself up in my room for the night and plan. I don't know what to plan though. Could I possibly screw up the heist Saturday? No, there's a chance they won't all be caught. If that happens, if even one of them gets away, that would be the end.

What about this other gang? The so-called Boss? I can't possibly get involved with them. Once they know my name or face I'm screwed. Is there a way I can clue them in though? Seems Clover and the group doesn't want anyone else to know. This is meant to be some sort of statement from them, or just a way to move up by proving themselves, who knows. The fact remains that I'm in a lot of trouble if I don't get out of this fast.

By the time I hop off the bus the only thing I can really think of is disappearing at school, going to Mom's work to try and see the last person involved, then get back to school before it ends. However, even then I will only know everyone involved, not how to get rid of them. This is getting more frustrating by the second.

What sucks more is I know I could use help with this. I want to tell someone, honestly, I want to be able to scream and shout about how unfair this is and ask for help. But the less everyone else knows the better. If only I get hurt in this (or worse) then...then it's for the best. Doing this alone, it's what has to be done.

With a heavy sigh, I go to walk to my porch when, suddenly, car lights start flashing. I flinch then squint my eyes at the familiar car that's sitting on the street. More threats? Seriously? I realize I can't do anything, they don't need to do that.

I shake my head and turn away, but they do it again. This time I stand there in confusion when the lights keep flashing until they stop. I'm not sure what that's supposed to mean so, hesitantly, I walk forward. When the car doesn't suddenly start moving or flashing again, I walk a little faster until I'm standing next to the driver's door. The window rolls

down to show Stranger. He must have driven here and switched with whoever was watching the house.

"Get in," he says without looking at me.

"Why?"

"Because I said so."

Well, that kind of explanation would get an F on an essay. Someone missed out on schooling.

Rolling my eyes, I walk to the other side and slip in, shutting the door behind me. The car isn't running now, it's dead silent. A car drives by, the engine softens in the distance. He isn't looking at me and I'm growing more uncomfortable by the second. It's at least five minutes before he finally asks, "How did they find you anyways?"

"You weren't told?"

"Nope."

"Then I'm not saying either."

The man snorts and I'm half expecting him to hit or threaten me, but he doesn't. Instead, he leans back in the seat and asks a different question, "You really want nothing to do with this? You have a single parent, seems you're comfortable, but with all that extra money you and your mom could be happy."

"We're already happy," I growl, gnawing at the inside of my cheek afterwards. "Why the hell are you asking me that anyway? You already know I'm not here of my own free will, otherwise, you wouldn't be watching my house. Why are you talking to me? I just saw you."

"Because I can't exactly show them this."

Stranger suddenly pulls something from his pocket that has me going wide-eyed. It's a badge, a freaking police badge, which I immediately snatch. He has no issue with that, letting me look the thing over although I have no idea how to tell if it's real or not.

"What kind of joke is this?" I hiss, my paranoia is shooting through the roof. "Did that Clover idiot put you up to this? Act like an undercover cop and see if I'd work with you or something?"

"Clover?" he snickers.

"That's quite the scheme, but no," Stranger answers in a steady tone that should relieve me but it doesn't. Although his expression doesn't give way that he's lying, I can't help but feel he is. Great, my trust issues are multiplying.

As much as I wish this to be true, there are too many reasons it shouldn't be. I hold the badge out to the nut case while speaking my mind, "Even if it is true, why would you tell me this? If you're undercover, you can't tell anyone, or probably even carry this badge, especially tell or show a kid you don't even know."

"I know enough."

He snags the badge out of my hands then slips it into his jacket pocket before turning to face me. The look in his eyes is firm and his voice even more so. "I know that you have a gift, a crazy one, one that Milton is using to his advantage."

Milton? I snort. What a name for a crook, doesn't suit him in the least.

"If you think you are up shit creek now, wait till this heist goes down. Trust me, it will succeed, then the man he works for will find out about you."

I don't like the sounds of that. Although I've been thinking about it, Stranger makes it sound even worse.

"When he does, this will look like a cake walk. There won't be men sitting outside your home. There won't be small time bank robberies. You won't see your mom again, he'll keep her under heavy lock and key to make you do whatever the hell he wants. If you complain or go against his orders, death will be something your mother will wish for."

A lump forms in my throat, one I can't swallow. Maroon 5 knows it best, it's getting harder and harder to breathe. My palms are sweating. The walls are closing in. This is too much too fast.

"And I am risking my life by admitting this, but the consequences of anyone worse than Milton getting their hands on someone like you is far worse. The city has been working our asses off to destroy these damn gangs, but all that will be for nothing because of one kid that I don't even know so—" Stranger rests his arm against the wheel and looks me dead in the eye when he asks, "Do you believe me now?"

I don't know. I want to believe him. I want to believe someone is on my side, but my gut is twisting itself into an unappetizing pretzel. His eyes are locked with mine, waiting for

a response that I don't know how to give. Be honest? Because that's about all I can do.

"I'm not sure," I answer, but he doesn't seem all that taken aback. "But I want to, and I need as much help as I can get...so, what's your name?"

"Kane."

"Is that your real name?" I ask, eyeing the man that I am still uncertain of.

"No, but I don't want you messing them up while we're around the others."

That's understandable so I nod.

"You know Milton already, the one with the clover tattoo." He gestures beneath his left eye. "The blonde girl is actually his cousin, Talley, and her boyfriend is York. There's one other that you don't know about. She's meant to be the driver on the day of the heist."

"So they have been keeping one from me, was it on purpose?"

Kane hums in response. "The bunch may seem stupid, but actually they're just chaotic. Can't keep their heads straight all the time, but they're smart. Talley is wicked with any sort of blade and is talented in any fight. York is a whizz kid, computer genius, and Milton can memorize a building or city after a leisurely walk. The last girl, her name's Gena, and I'm sure you can guess that she's an excellent driver."

Finally, I'm getting some real answers. My paranoia is still at an all time high, I bet it could break a Guinness World Record, but I'm settling bit by bit. "So why are they bringing you into this? You seem to be higher up in this gang than they are."

"I got in by making friends with them first a while back, known them for years. I'm not as chaotic as they are so moving up was easier than I thought, but I've always kept in touch. They may not be that high on the food chain, but it's handy keeping them around."

"Do you know why they want to do this on their own? Why didn't they just hand me over to your Boss? Who is he anyway?"

Kane frowns and leans back. He's reluctant to tell me. Considering the situation, he gives in, but keeps it straight. "It's best if you don't know too much about them. If things go sour, the less you know the better, but Milton hates being dead last. He thinks performing this heist will get him some brownie points compared to just bringing you in."

"So why not bring more people on?"

"Doesn't wanna give them the credit."

"Do you think their plan will work? Will he move up whatever chain of command they have?"

"I know it won't. Milton has caused a lot of shit, if anything, they'll all be killed afterwards and you taken in."

Kane certainly has no issues being honest with me, kinda reminds me of myself, which is weird. As frightening as it is to hear, I'm grateful. I would rather he be blunt about the situation than sugar coat it. The more serious I feel the situation is, the more serious I will take it. It's for the best.

I thought the situation was bad before, but now it's proving to be worse. Of course, having Kane will make everything easier, at the same time, he's opening up a whole new issue. Glancing at him, I wonder what he plans to do afterwards. Is he going to tell someone? Is my secret safe? It's not everyday someone meets a boy that can go invisible. I'm sure a cop would love to bring that story in.

"So, let's say we work together and somehow get me out of this mess," I say causing Kane to peer at me from the corner of his eye. "What are you going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you plan to tell anyone, the cops, about what I can do?"

"Would they believe me?" He chuckles. "I didn't believe it myself."

"But you saw. You know it's true. You're...you're not going to sell me out to the government or something so they come to my house, abduct me, and force me to live in a basement in Arizona, are you?"

"Arizona?"

"Isn't that where Area 51 is?"

"Nevada."

"Whatever, my point is, will you keep it secret?" I ask in a trembling tone that I didn't mean to do. Seems I can't control a lot of my emotions lately. I'm going to cut myself some slack for it though, it's understandable.

"I won't tell anyone, Micah, I promise."

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"You don't, but you don't have much of a choice."

That's what I hate about this. Not being in control of a single thing, it sucks.

"But let me ask you something," he says, pointing his finger at me accusingly. "Is it safe to assume Milton found out about your powers because you stopped him from committing a crime?"

I bite my lip so that's answer enough for him.

"Are you going to keep it up? Being the hero?" He asks while sounding honestly concerned. "It's what got you into this mess, isn't it?"

"Yeah," I answer honestly with a slow nod. "I caught him trying to break into a car. He ran off but came back, saw me reappear under the stairs at my school. After that, seems he and his pals followed me...I go out to practice sometimes."

"Practice?"

"Yeah, see what I'm capable of. Whatever, the point is that, yes, he caught me because I caught him initially."

"Ok, so, answer the question, do you plan to continue?" Kane isn't asking in a tone of annoyance or even concern. He sounds, and looks, curious. To be perfectly honest, so am I. That's an excellent question.

Am I?

He's right. It's what got me into this mess. I was playing the hero, acting all half cocked because I'm invisible. The "no one can see me anyway" excuse has been disproven because someone did see me and now here I am. Mom was right, I got myself into trouble. I'm just a kid with no idea what I'm doing, at the same time, it feels so wrong to say I'll stop.

"All my life I've had this gift, you even called it that yourself, a gift."

Kane nods while I hold my hands out before me. I flex my fingers as I remember all the times I've grabbed a thief before he got away, returned a purse, or stopped a scared girl from being assaulted. It would be a lie to say I wasn't scared in those moments. My

heart was always thumping in my ears. My body was shaking. My mind was reeling. I was petrified, as petrified as them in that moment. There was always a chance I'd get hurt, or worse, but...I was always more scared for them; those people that really couldn't do much of anything.

I wanted to help. I wanted to step up. I didn't want to be the hero with all the recognition, praise, and love in the world. I just wanted to help. I did it because I could, but the thing is, I could have done the exact opposite.

What I'm being forced to do, steal, I could have gone down that path. I can go freaking invisible. I could rob banks, break into houses, really do whatever I want and get away with it, but that isn't the path I chose. I went the complete opposite, helping people because I can, because I want to, because it's something I feel is right.

Isn't that my answer?

"I really have no idea why it's me or what I am meant to do with this," I answer, peering at the hands in my lap that I'm now realizing have helped more people than I can remember. "But, the one thing I can do is make the world a little better, even if no one knows about it."

Looking up, I watch Kane for a response, which he gives in the form of his first smile. "You're a good guy, Micah. I seriously hope that we can get you out of this because the world certainly needs someone like you."

I'm not sure how to respond to that so I nervously clear my throat. Kane doesn't ask me anything more, instead, he goes into talking about a plan that he seems to have already come up with.

"I'm meant to keep a watch on your mom Saturday. You all have to meet up at the warehouse before going to the bank and that is where you'll have to make a move."

"What move? Call the cops and hope they get there before we leave?" I ask, but Kane shakes his head. I scratch mine in hopes to come up with an idea. "Is there any way you could call them, tell them my mom went missing? I won't show up either, they'll think I ran off."

"They'll go straight for your friends."

"I have to stop them before they get the chance, stall them. I'll obviously be at the warehouse so I'll call the cops when I get there then let you know that I've done it. Wait a few minutes, call the gang up to let them know my mom ran off so they won't think

you're in on it. I'll keep them at the warehouse until the cops arrive, what do you think?" I ask nervously. Each suggestion has Kane looking a bit more uncomfortable.

"Also risky," he answers immediately. "You honestly think you can keep all four of them there? If one gets out, your friends could be killed."

"Do we have any other options? We can't risk just calling the cops on them now, it'll clue them in that you might be involved. At least this way they'll just think I told my mom what happened so she ran off while I stayed behind to get them."

Kane doesn't look so convinced. I can't blame him. This plan, if one wishes to even call it that, is awful. Considering our situation though, there aren't a lot of options. Kane knows this, I know this, and it is all kinds of bad.

"If this is our plan then you need to know where your friends are Saturday. If one gets out, you need to be able to get to them before they do."

"One is already taken care of. We're meant to meet at the zoo, but I'll make sure to know about the others."

"I suggest you work out a way to make sure you keep the four of them inside that warehouse as long as possible. You have two days, Micah. I'll try to help, but I'm not always gonna be here, and I can't risk giving you my contact yet or ruining my position here."

"I know, I appreciate that you're willing to do even this much."

Kane nods and we agree to meet up again Friday evening. He's supposed to watch the house that evening so, like he said, I have to find a way to guarantee this plan will work. I've got two days and it feels like the clock is ticking faster than ever.

My nerves are eating away at me when I'm taking the steps up onto my porch. However, when I see the lights on next door, I get this sudden urge to see Leo. Right now, I don't think I can focus on the issues at hand anyways so, rather than continue uselessly wracking my brain, I decide the best option is to take a breather. I'm not sure what Kane thinks about that, if anything. He doesn't flash the lights at me when I head over to Leo's house so I take that as a good sign.

After knocking, the door swings open to show Mrs. Halton smiling at me in a pair of sweats and a baggy shirt. She's quick to invite me in before shouting up to Leo that I've come over. There's a loud sound upstairs that has me and Mrs. Halton raising a brow.

"Are you dead?" She laughs causing me to shake my head when Leo shouts a rather panicked 'no' in response. "Go on up, Sweetie. I don't know what he's up to."

I'm more than happy to oblige, ascending the stairs two at a time before getting to Leo's door. I'm tempted to knock, but honestly, I want to know what he's up to so I swing the door open. I am pleased with what I see, a panicked Leo trying to shimmy his way into a pair of basketball shorts while his shirt is only halfway pulled on.

"Did I interrupt something?" I ask teasingly.

"No," he answers immediately, finally pulling on his pants and fixing his shirt. Damn, I liked it better before. "I just...I only had boxers on."

"So?"

"So, I wasn't decent."

"You weren't decent...what century are you from?"

"You know what I mean!"

"Obviously, I don't. Why are you so nervous about it? I know what's under there." I point to his pants that has him taking a step back. "Well, I have an idea, but if you'd like to properly educate me on it, I wouldn't mind."

"Micah," he hisses with wide eyes. "Were you always a pervert?"

"Yeah, why? Are you disappointed?"

Judging by his smile and blushing cheeks, I take that as a no. Laughing, he gestures for me to come on over and have a seat on the bed. It's about the only option for us both to sit so I take it while examining his room again. Looks the same as before, but now I see two printed out tickets to the zoo on his desk.

"We could have gotten those at the gates," I say while pointing to them.

"Ah, I just...got over excited I guess," Leo nervously laughs then gets up to grab them. He swings the tickets around like he's going to show me but ends up sitting them back down.

"How much were they?" I ask.

"Secret."

"I can just ask when we get there."

"Doesn't matter. I already bought them."

"You know, Beckett told me it's definitely a date if they pay."

Leo laughs, looking at me with a wide grin. "I was unaware that is the rule."

"Same."

Leo sits beside me on the bed. Our arms brush and I take note of the amount of space on the bed. He could have sat farther away but didn't, so could I, but that's not the point.

"Want to watch a movie?" Leo asks almost nervously.

"Sure." I shrug and watch Leo get up to grab his remote.

He flicks on the TV while I text Mom to let her know I'm next door and won't be back till later. While Leo is pulling up Netflix, I swing my legs onto the bed and make myself comfortable. There's nowhere else to really sit in his room and, well, I am excited to see the look on his face.

Leo does not disappoint. When he turns back around to find me comfortably sitting on his bed, his face takes on it's favorite shade of red. He hesitates to move, remaining a few steps from the bed for at least five minutes with his eyes on everything but me. I watch in amusement until, finally, he walks over and sits beside me.

"What do you want to watch?" He asks, mindlessly scrolling through his recommendations.

"Whatever, it's up to you."

"That doesn't help."

"Fine, something funny."

"I can do that!" Leo announces happily and is quick to put on a movie I've never seen.

Typically, I'm not a lover of comedy movies, but considering the mess that is currently my life, I need a good laugh. It's odd how normal it feels to be laying here in Leo's room with him laughing next to me considering that only a few days ago we barely said more than a "hi" to each other, which was my fault. However, I'm not complaining. The only

good thing that has come out of this week is Leo. I can't imagine how I'd be reacting without him.

Panicking. Crying. Ripping my hair out in the closet of my room while hoping the Bogeyman comes out and devours me heart and soul. Because the tension building in my gut and the fear rising in my throat is enough to drown me and the universe with it. People have the occasional dream about something like this, perhaps during their sleep or while mindlessly working. We imagine ourselves as a hero, maybe someone in a difficult situation and it seems so cool. We're relaxed or we've got it handled and everything ends happily but...being in it. Actually being in this situation, makes me realize how absolutely horrible it is. If I didn't think I had control of my life before, I don't know what to say about it now.

~

Quite the long chapter this one. Is Kane actually going to help though? Will their plan actually work? And will Micah continue being "the hero" after all this has happened?

Chapter 12

I wish I could say I'm not scoping out the bank I'm meant to rob come Saturday morning, but alas, this is my life now. The pieces of garbage forcing me to do this are waiting across the street in a hotel room, keeping tabs on the bank through the window. At least Kane is there as well. Although he has to treat me like crap in front of the others, I feel better knowing he's on my side.

While they wait for my return, I'm checking out the inside of the bank to make sure the blueprints were right. Obviously I'm the best option for this particular job, but after what I heard between Clover (he never told me their names so it's best I go with the nickname) and Kane the other day, their gang or whatever doesn't "own" or "work" in this part of town. Seems it is best if they aren't seen so might as well send the invisible boy to scope everything out. Lucky me.

Clarity Bank is more upscale than others I've seen. It's in a nicer part of town, even the customers seem higher class with expensive looking attire and jewelry. I'm not surprised they picked this place, not to mention Kane seemed hesitant with the plan. They probably have pretty nice security, which is proven correct when I see two armed security guards standing just inside the glass doors.

I follow an elderly woman through, slipping by people so they don't run into an "invisible wall." Inside is even nicer with a dazzling chandelier overhead and marbled flooring. The bank is pretty busy with some customers following office workers into cubicles or offices while others are going up to the tellers. No one notices me slipping behind the counters or traversing the offices upstairs.

From what little I can remember of the blueprint, everything seems to be right. I find the vault, safe, whatever one wishes to call it, very easily. I stand there for a moment watching people walk by until one finally has to open it to hand out more cash to the tellers. Peaking my head inside, I find far more cash than expected.

Now days most people use online banking or credit cards. I didn't actually think banks held a lot of cash on site, but this is a bank for a bit more of an upscale area. I suppose more people equals more chances of someone wanting cash. There's also the fact that Clover claimed there will be even more brought in Friday night. This only makes me hope even more that the plan with Kane works. I don't want those idiots getting their hands on any of this.

After about an hour of walking the entire building and checking the multiple exits I've been told about, I finally leave. My head's starting to hurt a little, which is odd since being invisible this long hasn't bothered me before. The stress must actually be getting to me, but I manage to remain unseen all the way back to the hotel room.

"What did I tell you guys? Piece of cake," Clover says when I appear at their sides. Mop Head and Blondie are grinning from ear to ear. "So, what'd it look like in there?"

"Fine. Everything is where it should be," I answer begrudgingly. The expressions on their faces tell me they are having more fun teasing me than thinking about the robbery. That's screwed up and I hate them even more now.

"Now that we've got that checked out, Freak, come 'ere. There's something more we gotta talk 'bout." Clover doesn't wait for me to walk over. Instead, he grabs me by the collar of my shirt and tugs me to his side. I stumble forward but he keeps me upright with his grip.

"What is it?" I grumble. Once again, Clover swings his arm over my shoulders. I hate it when he does that. He's far too close.

"See now, there is a chance this won't work and the ones that are at a disadvantage are us," Clover explains, which I already knew. Technically, I can't really get caught. No one is going to see me. "So, Saturday we are leavin' the moment you go in, got it?"

I nod, although I don't see why he's telling me this. Either way, the car has to be waiting for me.

"I don't want you thinkin' cause we ain't here that you can pull one over on us. Believe me when I say your mom will find herself in a rather unpleasant position should you try to screw this up on purpose."

"I am well aware of that. You have made my position abundantly clear."

Clover grins triumphantly, which makes my insides churn. I'm even more motivated to give him a good punch to the face Saturday morning. Please let this plan work and please let me give them all a good ass kicking. After all this, they deserve it.

"Ya know, you've been actin' real smug," Clover says in a very dislikable tone.

"I'm always smug."

"I think your attitude needs a little re-adjusting so, why don't we all go out and have a little fun?" Clover looks around the room, smirking at the eager nods he gets from Mop Head and Blondie. Kane, however, doesn't look so thrilled with the idea.

"And what exactly do you mean by that?" Kane questions, causing Clover to stiffen. His eyes scream he hasn't really thought this through. Kane groans. "We can't be running around getting ourselves into useless trouble before the heist."

"We won't get caught. No one will even see this freak comin'!"

I flinch at Clover's words. They are far too similar to the excuses I used to give my mom.

They never saw me coming. They couldn't see me anyway. I'm invisible so how can I get caught?

Yet here I am, caught and in a sticky situation that I've always been warned about. Lesson learned.

"Let's hit up that old bitty's place, the one that's always threatin' to call the cops on us," Clover says. The look on his face resembles a kid that's about to let off some firecrackers in a neighbor's yard; pure gleeful evil.

"Doubt there's much there," Mop Head argues. Blondie nods, seeming to only take his side because they have their stupid fling.

Kane agrees. "Not even worth the trouble."

Then Clover's eyes widen and a villainous sheen twinkles in his eyes. Grinning from ear to ear, the heathen asks, "How about Marsho's place?"

"Hell yeah!" Blondie shouts in excitement that is not shared by Kane or Mop Head. Kane looks like his veins are about to pop from frustration and Mop Head's jaw is pulling a Looney Tunes and hitting the floor.

"You're joking?" Kane asks, but almost states it at the same time.

The shaking of Clover's head is what makes Kane throw his hands in the air. I'm watching in pure confusion wondering what this Marsho place is and why half are down with the idea and the other not.

"It'll be a quick run, in and out. We won't take much, but if this freak can even get close then the bank will be easy," Clover says with a snap of his fingers.

"This is worse than hitting a bank. If we're caught we're dead on the spot," Mop Head chimes in with a firm shake of his head. Blondie is frowning now, looking at Mop Head with pleading eyes since she clearly wishes to go.

Figures. Crazy plan is loved by a crazy person. I think she takes the saying *"blondes just wanna have fun"* a little too seriously.

"We aren't going. The freak is." Clover points to me, the still very unwilling participant.

Kane's brow furrows, his eyes resting on me for a moment before he holds his hands up and says, "Regardless, count me out. I've been gone long enough."

I stare at Kane in disbelief, but he isn't sparing me so much as a glance. He's just leaving?! He's the one joking now, right? I have no idea who, or what, this Marsho is about, but it's obviously unsafe and a stupid idea yet he's going to let these idiots drag me there? Even if he can't act like he's on my side, he wouldn't actually throw me to the dogs, right?

Kane's arms are crossed and lips set into a firm line when Blondie squeaks at him, "Party pooper!"

"If you all want to risk getting caught days before the big one, that's up to you."

"Come on, Kane, we need a test run, don't ya think?" Clover tries to convince him.

For once, I'm on his side. I'd much rather Kane tag along, but judging by the way he's suddenly looking at me with a cold gaze, I think he wouldn't help even if he tagged along. Although that makes sense, even if part of me understands, I feel like he just stabbed me in the back. I'm questioning everything. Can I really trust him after this?

"You had one at the convenience store, but now you want to try something stupid like rob Marsho?" Kane argues while already walking to the door. "Like I said, I'm out. Have fun."

Kane doesn't say goodbye, only gives one last look into the hotel room, directly at me, before he leaves. The door shuts behind him, somehow the sound is enough to make my ears ring. My hands clench into trembling fists. He really just left me. I can't believe it, or is it that I don't want to?

Clover claps after Kane's departure, earning everyone's attention. He's still grinning like the mad man that he is when he looks to Mop Head and asks, "You in or what?"

Blondie is tugging on Mop Head's arm furiously. After a few moments of silence, he lets out a defeated sigh. "Sure, whatever, but if there's any sign of trouble I'm bolting with or without you."

Clover doesn't seem bothered. That's probably because he'd do the same. What a great bunch of pals they are.

"That settles it then. The four of us are gonna have a little test run."

"No," I finally throw in my two cents even if I know it's pointless. As expected, I'm completely ignored.

"Alright!" Blondie cheers, pumping her fists into the air.

My stomach drops. I try to leave, but Clover throws his arm over my shoulder again. One of these days I am going to rip his arm out of its socket!

His grip tightens when he leans over and says, "Come on, don't want cha missin' out on any of the fun."

"This isn't exactly what I would describe as fun."

Being ignored is apparently my new thing because that's all that happens when the three escort me out of the hotel. Their car reeks of cigarettes. The seats are dirty and there's trash ranging from empty beer and whiskey bottles to cartons of cigarettes and junk food wrappings. Is something rotting in here? Because it smells like an actual dumpster, fitting for the equivalent of human trash that owns it.

I have no clue where Marsho's place is or what makes them think it's a good idea to rob it. They really are idiots. There's no plans? We're just driving to an obviously dangerous place to steal from some likely dangerous people? And by we I mean me because they're going to be safe in the car. Invisible or not, I could get killed. What even is this?!

Please, someone cancel this show already. I'm sure the ratings are crap.

"Shouldn't you clue me in on what exactly is going on since I'm the one risking my neck for the three dumb asses that will be safe in the car?" I growl, uncaring if it earns me a whack to the back of the head from Clover. I barely budge, sitting angrily in the back seat with my arms crossed.

Clover is lighting up a cigarette when he says, "You're real annoyin', kid. You're lucky that you are of use or I'd gut ya right here and now."

My nose scrunches at the stench that intensifies. Smoke fills the car because, for some reason, the jerk can't roll down his window. Suppose I don't mind the idea of them all dying from lung cancer, but can't they do that while I'm not around?

"There's only a few things ya need to know. First and most important, don't get caught," Clover starts to explain, pointing his lit cigarette at me. The smoke fills my nostrils, burning my throat with each breath. "Second, don't touch or grab anything we don't tell ya to."

"I thought you'd be proud of me robbing extra. What's wrong? Suddenly you get a little scared?"

"Do you know what a cigarette burn feels like?" Clover twirls the stick between his fingers. Mop Head's smirk can be seen in the rear view mirror causing me to scowl and keep quiet. "Good, keep ya trap shut unless ya wanna find out. As I was sayin', do what we tell ya. In and out cause this ain't no place with some guards that will tell ya to freeze first. You get caught or bring up suspicion the blokes are gonna shoot before askin' any questions, got it?"

"Got it."

Remembering Kane leaving earlier feels even worse now. This doesn't sound like a safe job, not to say the bank heist is either. If Kane knew this place was bad news and honestly left me to try and survive on my own, I don't know if I can trust him anymore. Undercover or not (if that's even true,) he's throwing me into the fire without a second glance.

When Mop Head comes to a sudden stop I swing my head around in search of the target. However, there's nothing that really stands out. We're actually in a pretty nice part of town. Nothing too upscale, but not dingy either. There are some restaurants and office buildings but nothing that makes me think we'd hit it.

"Down there." Mop Head points to the street on our left. "There's a restaurant called Hilden, you can waltz right in easily enough, but you gotta go through the kitchen to get to the back rooms. Will likely be quite a few busy bodies back there."

Hilden? I thought this place was called Marsho? Then is the person who owns it called Marsho? I'm so confused. They're not going to explain anything to me so why bother asking.

"There's a door in the backroom with a large golden M on it. Give it a few knocks and someone will answer. Run on in, but keep quiet cause there's gonna be some unfriendlies in there."

"Let me guess, smoking cigars and playing poker at a round table?" I ask, causing Blondie to howl with laughter. Mop Head just shakes his head and ignores my inquiry to go on.

"There should be wads of cash back there—"

"For poker?"

"Will you shut up?" Clover hisses, slamming me hard against the door. I groan and rub my now reddening arm.

"Yes, for the poker game. Take a few stacks, whatever you can carry in, uh—" Mop Head searches around the car until Blondie hands him something. He grins from ear to ear before handing me an absolutely hideous cheetah print bag that should have been discontinued before it even began. At least let me rob in style!

I don't bother touching the disgusting thing when I ask, "You're joking?"

"Nabbed it off some brat—"

"You stole it from a kid?"

"Mom wasn't lookin' and she had a cellphone in here. Can you believe six year olds have cell phones nowadays?" Mop Head clicks his tongue. "Easy pickin'. Anyways, take it."

He throws the bag into my lap, which is already burning just from touching it. What mother would buy their child this? It's ugly as hell. Gimme some Gucci!

"Once you got the money, run right back out. Think you can do that?" Mop Head turns to look at me between the seats. Blondie is turned in her own, peering at me from over top the head rest with quivering eyes of excitement.

"If I can't?" I ask. Clover growls, probably ready to whack me again. I try to explain before the abuse starts. "This doesn't sound like the nicest place and if some cash magically disappears, or they think a ghost is knocking at the door, I am going to have to bolt."

"Then you best make sure you aren't caught. Now get goin'." Clover leans over to open the door then literally kicks me out of the car into the middle of the street.

The door is slammed shut behind me moments before I throw myself against the car to avoid the one barreling down the street. Their horn blares angrily until they disappear down the road. I've been having too many run in's with death lately. Eventually the jerk's gonna get fed up and whack me off for good!

After glaring at the three stooges in the car, I head off to a dark alley to brood, and disappear. The walk is short but feels so long. Each step is heavier than the last as the weight of what's about to come beats me like a fifth grade bully during recess.

First the convenience store, now this? Even in a small shop I risked injury, but now it's clear I risk much more than that. Why does it feel like I'm starting the boss battle before even looking at the level?

When I reach Hilden's there's a moment where I swear time stops. No one's moving. No one's breathing. There's no sounds of the public bustling about the streets nor the car engines humming along the road. My own heart doesn't beat. Then it picks back up with a sudden sense of booming volume that makes me weak at the knees.

The restaurant looks inconspicuous. There are no brutes standing at the door with ugly mugs and battle scars. The windows are clean, showing off the typical atmosphere within of families, couples, and friends eating everyday meals. The door opens when a couple walks in with me slipping through behind. Soft music plays over the speakers, some pop song that eludes me, but given the circumstances, everything is eluding me that isn't the few rules Clover gave me to. They're ringing in my head, or maybe that's the guilt nibbling at my conscience until all that's left is a pile of useless goo? Who knows!

Nothing is out of the ordinary the more I walk through the restaurant with tentative steps. My stomach is making the rumblies thanks to the smell, which only worsens when I step into the kitchen while following a waiter. It's even more difficult to evade the bullets back here because that's what food workers are, bullets. I swear I don't even see some of them pour drinks, that's how fast they are. I'm slammed up against a wall to avoid the few running about to make or grab orders. This feels more dangerous than the robbery!

They were right. There's a lot of people, and I'm not certain I can make it through. With a constantly moving crowd and little moving space, this makes me feel like a rat in an electrified maze. The golden M that Mop Head told me about is here to save, or ruin the day depending on how one looks at it. Like he said, it's in the backroom across the kitchen on an oak door. It stands out like a sore thumb so I make my way over, dodging chef's and actually hiding under tables when there are too many people to avoid.

Someone drops flour all over the floor, the white dust is thrown into my face, which I quickly wipe off while trying to hold back my coughs.

I can't do this. Seriously. There's no way. These idiots are going to get me killed before the bank heist even happens! How did I get caught by them? I'm humiliated!

Footsteps echo and voices boom over the sizzling of stoves. I'm left hiding under a table for some time, nearly tripping a waitress with my foot that happens to be a little too far out. She stumbles, but doesn't even look back at what made her almost face plant. Then someone is reaching under the table. Their hand is right next to me. My heart is beating in my ears then the hand is gone and I let out a slow breath.

Bit by bit, I move towards the door with my head on a swivel. By the time I've reached said door it feels like I've been through war. How anyone can hear a knock through all this commotion in the back is beyond me, but I do as I'm told. Three heavy knocks that don't earn so much as a glance from those in the kitchen. Only a few seconds pass before the door is opened and, honestly, I want to punch the doorman because it feels like he shouldn't open a door so easily. Whatever, I'm not the head of security. I'm the unwilling robber.

Now the doorman is textbook mob looking with biceps the size of Texas, a square jaw and a flat head. He nearly takes up the whole doorway, appearing more as a black wall in his tux than a human being. Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum, anyone?

I slide on in by angling myself like a cat slipping through the slit of a box. The room is fairly large with it's own mini-bar, a jukebox playing songs that grandparents would probably know, a pool table and, sure enough, the poker table where three men and two women are currently playing. They're all dressed to impress in clothes that could probably pay for my college tuition and a nice seven day cruise for a dozen and their best friend's cousin.

"Who is it?" A man calls from the table, stretching a tad to peer over the others.

"No one!" The doorman responds. The door clicks shut.

Looking about, I find that there aren't any security cameras, none that I can see anyway. That actually worries me more because it means there's work back here that they wish no one to see, or rather not be able to prove has happened.

I'm maneuvering myself over to the long black table behind the poker game. Calling it "wads of cash" would be an understatement. This basically is another bank with towers of money reaching from one end to the other. There are some men stashing some in

duffle bags and taking them to another room connected to it, but I don't even bother looking to see where it leads.

"No one? Then why'd you answer the door?" A woman sneers, flicking ashes from her cigarette. I have to dodge them, swinging my right leg to the side to avoid the gray specks that fall to the floor.

Wow, someone has to clean that up later. Rude.

Tip toeing to the back, I stand before the money that I bet is mostly fake or stolen. I'm already on the verge of belching so when I nervously grab a handful I end up actually tasting vomit at the back of my throat. My head's constantly swiveling back and forth between the money and the table. The shaking of my hands won't stop as I nab one small portion after the other from different sections of the table.

There's only one thought in my head on horrid repeat; *I'm gonna get caught. I'm gonna get caught. I'm gonna get caught.*

Every sound, every movement is intensified by a million. The hair on the back of my neck is standing at attention. My knees are about to give. Am I even breathing? Because I feel light hearted and my chest hurts. Water is building in my eyes and the lights blur together. The bank heist has to be stopped because this is a life I could never live. How others possibly could is beyond me. It's deplorable. It's disgusting. I want to rub my skin until it's raw. I want to scream and cry and run and never look back. But I can't be scared now. I can't worry or fret or stand idly by. One slip up and I'll be in this life forever, or dead.

So I rush to finish the job, stuffing the purse until it's full. I make my way to the door the same way I left, but there's one rather big problem.

How the hell do I get out?

I knocked to get in but now the doorman is standing with his back pressed to the wall before the door. He's tapping his feet to the music but refusing to move. It's not like I can open the door without getting caught. They'll be more than confused about it magically opening, not like they could accurately guess how or why, but then they might notice some money is missing.

"What the hell?!"

Too late.

"Marsho, there's money missing!"

I've been caught.

"What?!" Marsho, the same man that spoke earlier, hollers while jumping from his seat at the table. Marsho and the others with him rush to the back table to find the missing cash. It's not like I stole a bunch from the same pile though, how did they notice so quickly?!

"Are you sure you didn't pack more and miscount?" Marsho asks while I'm pressing my back to the wall across the room.

"I'm sure I didn't miscount! There's at least ten missing from the time I last saw it!"

"How could that happen? No one else has been in here!" The cigarette woman hisses. She spins on her heel to inspect the room. My stomach still drops when her eyes run past me.

"Go out front, check the camera's, look for anyone that seems suspicious!" Marsho orders, his voice forming a spear to impale me in the gut.

They're looking for the culprit, that culprit being me. What do I do? Where do I go? How do I get out of this?! They can't see me but they're going to look—

Wait, maybe this is a good thing?

I clutch the bag to my chest, watching men rush out of the backroom. The door is open and I sneak out into the kitchen. It's too chaotic to risk leaving so I hide beneath a table again, watching the feet run by one after the other. There's at least two dozen men rushing out in search of the thief.

Two dozen men that could spot Clover and Friends.

I bite my bottom lip to hold back a grin because I shouldn't be so happy about the idea of them possibly being gunned down. Even if caught I doubt anyone will believe them that an "invisible freak" stole their cash and there is no footage to prove otherwise. If Kane ducked out because this was a bad play then it must mean this Marsho is part of a group that isn't affiliated with Clover. I doubt they would be happy to find them on their "turf," or whatever they call it, so all I have to do is sit back and wait, right?

Except if they aren't caught they may suspect I set them up.

What do I do?

What do I do?

What can I do?

The backroom has settled and I'm finally capable of stepping out from under the table. The restaurant is ruffled, understandably so. After seeing twenty or so men rush out of the back I'd be ruffled too. I am ruffled.

I'm not sure what I'm doing while returning to the car. There's a chance my waiting paid off and they've already been caught, but when I turn the corner, the car isn't there. There's shouting behind me. Turning back, I see men coming this way. One points to the end of the street, which means they haven't checked it yet so...they left me.

They left.

Do they think I did this on purpose? I've forgotten how to breathe. Inhale, exhale, what's that? How do I do it because my lungs are aching and I can't move.

Someone runs into me, shouting in shock at hitting nothing. I bite my lip to keep back an apology then head in an unknown direction. My legs are moving, but my mind isn't, not until I realize something.

If they think I set them up, will they hurt Mom?

I duck behind a dumpster to try calling her. She doesn't answer. I dial the number again. No answer. Again and again and again until tears are streaming down my face.

Why isn't she answering? Please, oh God, please, no!

Now I'm running. I'm running faster than I ever have in my life. I don't know how many people I run into probably traumatizing them about ghosts or demons, but I don't care. I need to get home. I can't risk anyone seeing me either. With this stupid bag carrying probably thousands in cash, no one knows, but if someone even considers mugging me I'll be in big trouble. I'm already in big trouble. So I hop onto a bus unseen, maneuvering around so no one hits me. I'm so impatient, incapable of making sound but wanting to. Every curse known to mankind is on the tip of my tongue. The urge to scream and rip out my hair is indescribable.

If they hurt her. If they touch her. I don't know what I'll do. Please be ok. Please. Please.

When my stop is near I press the button to get off. Everyone is beyond confused when they don't see anyone exit. My feet are carrying me at a speed that burns my thighs. I nearly trip at the sight of two cars at the end of the street. Fear is coursing through me, a fear that's so deep and real that it feels like it's physically looming over me.

Mom's car is in the driveway. She's home. She's home and their car is right down the road. The only word on my mind is no. No and no and no over and over until I think that's the only word I can remember...until the porch light turns on. The front door opens and Mom peers out just as she pulls out her phone. She gasps.

This idiot must have let her battery die.

I drop to my knees on our sidewalk, finally able to catch my breath.

She's ok.

She's ok.

~

Here's one of the massive changes from the original. Another long chapter and more invisible boy shenanigans and fear. Did you expect Kane to just leave Micah to fend for himself? Can he still be trusted after what he has done? And if you read this prior, do you like this addition?

Chapter 13

They're waiting for me.

There's no other reason they're here and it's the only reason I walk up to the car we were in earlier. I knock on the window. There's a soft click of the doors before the back door is pushed open. Sure enough, Clover is sitting in the car with a smile that only grows when the car door shuts behind me and I reappear, bag in hand.

"My, my, my." Clover whistles when I hand him the bag. "You actually got it."

His eyes widen when he sees how much I got. Throwing his head back, Clover cackles in a rough sound like that of a crumbling paper bag. He hands it off to Mop Head, who shouts in victory while Blondie is already digging her hands through it.

"Here I was startin' to think you were tryin' to play us," Clover says while, once again, throwing his arm around my shoulder. I scowl.

"I couldn't get out in time before they noticed the money was gone."

"But you got it and yourself out before gettin' caught. You're truly excellent thief material."

I'm too mentally exhausted to sass. Sighing, I ask, "Is that all for tonight?"

"Oh, why so down?" Mop Head teases, leaning back to pat my face with a stack of cash. I clench my eyes shut while he does so. I just want to go home.

Clover pats my shoulder far more roughly than he needs to. "Hey now, he could have been caught. Let's go a little easy on 'em. Besides, I think he's learned not to be a smug little shit all the time, haven't ya?"

I don't answer, which is good enough for him. Snickering, he shoves me into the door again.

"Now get out. We need ya rested for Saturday."

"And what about after?" I ask. For a moment Clover seems pleased, probably thinking I've decided to switch sides, but I crush that hope real quick. "I don't want to do this.

How come you're the only ones getting a pay off? After Saturday, won't you have enough to live off of? Leave me and my family alone and I'll do it without question."

"You'll do it without question anyways," Clover growls.

"And if I don't?"

Clover moves too fast for me to respond. I'm shoved into the door again, but this time, there's a gun pressed into the bottom of my chin. The barrell is pressed so roughly that it's hard for me to breathe. I gasp for breath. Clover only pushes forward until I'm clawing at his wrist.

"Listen 'ere. I don't give a shit about your moral compass. You're one of us now, Freak. Saturday, the day after, a year from now, you'll do whatever I tell ya because if ya don't I'm gonna kill everyone you love and make you watch. Do you understand?"

It's a rhetorical question seeing as I can't breathe.

Clover retreats allowing me to take a deep breath. My body is wracked with coughs while I try to regain my composure, taking deep breaths followed by short ones then not able to make them at all. I'm rubbing my neck that's throbbing and probably already red.

Like earlier, Clover opens the door and pushes me out. I roll out onto the road, hissing when the asphalt rips open the skin of my elbow. Looking up, I see Clover glaring down at me when he says, "You're not the hero anymore."

He slams the door. The car peels off onto the street. The second remains, sitting silently. Whoever is within is likely watching and I can't help but to wonder if it's Kane. The thought infuriates me.

"What are you doing, Micah?" I whisper while getting to my feet. Blood is dripping down my arm. I try picking some of the rocks out of the wound, hissing each time I do.

I can't stay out here any longer. I need to get inside. I need to see Mom. She's been getting suspicious considering that every night I've been gone this week. She messaged me quite a few times earlier before her phone died. I gave her a blatant lie about being at the movies, which is going to screw me over since I'm sure she's going to ask what I went to see.

Whatever, I don't have time to be thinking about any of that. There are more pressing matters, the obvious big one being getting myself out of this mess. Each day it's getting harder and harder not to crack, especially after today. Part of me honestly was serious

earlier, that if Clover simply agreed to leave me be afterwards I'd go through with the bank heist. Just accept my fate, but that won't happen and even if it did I wouldn't be able to actually do it.

Who said being a hero was fun? This sucks!

My complaints are put on hold though when I'm met by a situation that has me standing on the sidewalk with an *"are-you-freaking-serious"* expression. I feel the need to shout déjà vu or at least take note of the similarities. This is a terrible joke, right? Not to mention, what are the freaking chances?

There's a man dressed in a long sleeved hoodie and a baseball cap slipping into a nearby garage. The window of the door is busted. I can make out a pipe or crowbar in his right hand before the door shuts behind him.

Immediately, I think of Clover and how my life has been thrown into a ziplock bag, shaken furiously then dumped down a drain. Happened to see a thug breaking into a car and now here I am trapped by that thug. Now I see a guy obviously up to no good, so what do I do? Do I really have the time or energy to do anything? Not to mention, what if this one happens to see me too? Or someone else for that matter. So much more could go wrong during a time I need something to go right.

I'm reminded of my talk with Kane, even if his mere name makes my teeth grind. He asked me if I planned on continuing. I said yes, but now I'm not so sure. If I have to go through another day like today...I don't know if I can handle it.

My nerves are eating away at me, screaming that I could mess this up too and get into even more trouble. My heart's racing in ways it didn't before. Reality has run me over, backed up to hit me again then peeled out of the lot with all my hopes and dreams so now...

I turn and walk away.

I pretend like I didn't see anything and act like the guilt isn't gnawing away at me. My hands dig into my pants pockets, which I start to pinch the fabric of between my fingers because I feel unbelievably jittery. But the more I walk towards my house the slower my steps get until I come to a halt on my own porch steps.

There's no thoughts, nothing that really clicks in my head that says anything. All that happens is I slip into my backyard, hide on the porch, double check no one is around, and disappear before heading right back down the street.

There's a brief moment where I ask myself what makes me think I can keep this up without getting into more trouble, but that question is never answered. I open the garage door moments later to find the thug attempting to break into the car within. He spins around at the sound of squeaking hinges, confused at seeing nothing in the doorway.

Then I punch him square in the jaw.

Maybe I punch him a few times more than necessary and watch him run off in fear but the car is safe. He didn't manage to steal anything and, somehow, even after what happened today and my swirling thoughts, I feel a thousand times better. Somehow. No, maybe it's not somehow but, obviously, I feel better. Because that's what I said to Kane and that's what I feel now, this is what's right.

I went down this path of doing good, of helping out even if I'm not getting anything out of it other than knowing I helped. Maybe this is fate, maybe it's destiny that all this is happening now, either a reminder or a lesson, I'm not entirely sure. But what I am sure of is, I could have been like Clover and his gang but I'm not.

I'm me.

I'm the invisible boy that is going to continue using his powers for good, even if sometimes they get me into more trouble than I can handle. Maybe that makes me a naive idiot. Maybe that makes me a fool. Maybe it makes me a lot of things, but it sure as hell doesn't make me disappointed.

I'm proud, proud of myself and what I have accomplished and what I will continue to accomplish because this plan is going to work. I will make it work. I will do whatever it takes to fix this and I will continue to do whatever it takes to keep being me. I've never let anyone or anything stop me before so why should I now?

An incident like the convenience store won't happen again. An incident like Marsho's place won't happen again. That will never be my life because I've never wanted it before, not now and not in the future. The only person in charge of my future is me. I can't forget that. No matter how scary or nerve wracking it gets. I have to hold on to that future or I'll slip away.

With newfound courage and purpose, I head home unseen. Of course that means Mom is glaring at me the moment our back door opens and she knows that it's me. As if there could be any other invisible force opening our back door, but I'm so happy to see the glare. I'm happy to see her, that she's ok, and her stupid phone is charging on the kitchen counter.

"Micah, what are you doing?" She sighs with a shake of her head then purses her lips when I reappear in the kitchen.

"Coming home," I answer with a shrug. She looks ready to lecture me, but suddenly stops causing me to give her a confused stare. One that grows when she starts to smile.

"You must have had fun at the movies," she says and gestures for me to come over. I take the bowl she hands me, which has remnants of chocolate cake mix so I immediately start eating it. Chocolate helps lift one's mood, right? After today I definitely need it.

"What makes you say that?"

"You've seemed pretty down all week, but now you're smiling." She pats my cheek with a loving smile of her own. "Are you feeling better?"

I press the back of my hand to my cheeks as if that is meant to inform me about this so-called smile she speaks of. I guess I can kinda feel it. My cheeks are a little warm. I don't really know how to respond to that. Am I feeling better? I mean, I'm still super worried about Saturday, but...

"Yeah, I guess I am," I answer with another shrug. I don't know how to explain it. Maybe because I know, no matter what those jerks try to do, I'm always going to try and do the right thing? Sounds cheesy but that's the only way I can explain it.

"I'm surprised you're not at Leo's."

I roll my eyes. "He has a practice match tonight. Won't be home till late."

"Mhm, so, when did this happen?"

"What?"

"Your thing with Leo. Is it official yet?"

"No, but we're going to the zoo on Saturday."

Mom squeals with delight. I'm not surprised either. She adores Leo so the idea of us "being official" is something she'll adore more.

"Oh, is he ok with you telling me that?" Mom asks with slight worry. "I don't want to let it slip or something with his parents if they don't know."

"He already came out to his parents. It's why we started hanging out, actually," I answer then move over to the sink. Since Mom decided to bake some new concoction, I do the dishes for her. "He was planning to move into the dorms at college in hopes to be out, but not to his parents or anyone here. He asked me what I thought and I told him it was a dumb idea."

"Micah!"

"Well it is."

"Leo isn't like you though."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I huff while Mom starts to dry off the dishes and put them away.

"He's gentle," she explains, but let's be honest, that isn't much of an explanation.

"I'm gentle."

It's Mom's turn to snort. "Leo cares what other people think and that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it makes it much scarier. Although I am glad he spoke with his parents and everything is going well, you should still have some more tact. Being honest is ok, but you must be considerate of others feelings."

"Wow, you sound like my mom."

Mom giggles. "Gee, I wonder why."

Once I'm finished doing the dishes and Mom has put them all away, she comes up behind me to wrap her arms around my waist. I hum when she rests her head on my back and says, "If something's wrong, Sweetie, you know you can talk to me."

"I know."

Right now, the issue is I can't risk it. Maybe one day I'll tell her, far into the future when it is no longer an issue so she can smack me a few times over the head but ultimately laugh about it. Or maybe this will be a secret I take with me to the grave, only time will tell.

"Ok, as long as you're feeling better now, I won't ask about it. I'll call you back down when whatever the hell I just made is done." Mom laughs and pulls away, slapping me on the back as she does. I roll my eyes but head on up the steps feeling even lighter.

Checking my phone, I find that Leo's game should either be done or almost getting there. I text him asking how the game went, who won, all that jazz. Minutes later I get a happy response about their win and that they are actually at a restaurant eating right now. He'll be home soon and my night continues as such, texting Leo like a perfectly normal teenage boy with his perfectly normal crush.

Feels good. Feels the way that it should and it motivates me all the more to fix things come Saturday morning.

The new found determination in my gut is what drives me the following day. Beckett and Misty notice the new hop in my step as well, both expressing similar thoughts to me as Mom did.

"Surely you have not jumped Leo's bones already. Be gentle with the kid, he's too kind."

I shake my head at Beckett. "You say kid as if we aren't the same age."

"I'm just saying, don't taint him already."

"Taint?"

"With you around, he's either going to become evil or be complicit to your evil."

Well, I suppose to Beckett I'm pretty evil, but I don't plan to do that to Leo. Beckett annoys me while Leo is cute. There's a big difference and Beckett can probably sense I'm thinking something along those lines because he suddenly scowls.

"Screw you."

"I didn't say anything," I chuckle.

"You're thinking it."

"What?"

"Something evil."

"That's not exactly new," Misty chimes in, which has all of us nodding. Since the two of them are here, and I'm in a far better mood, I feel now is the best time to see what they are doing tomorrow. I promised Kane (who I'm still mad at) that I'd have the two of them out of the house, just in case. Luckily for me, the two are still in their puppy love stage and already have plans to go to the movies, hit up a restaurant, hang out at the mall

or some sappy date crap. I stopped listening after they said they had plans, that's all that matters. However, I'm put in a difficult spot when Beckett asks if I'd like to join.

"No thanks. Don't want to be the third wheel."

"You've never had an issue with being the third wheel," he argues.

"No. I simply have no one else to hang out with so I tolerate it."

"When you say it like that you seem very pitiful."

"I am."

Beckett laughs while Misty says, "You can come along, Micah. You haven't been hanging out with us all week."

"I've had after school detention."

"A good excuse. He's been hanging out with Leo," Beckett whispers the last part to Misty, which has both of them giggling over the "gossip." Whatever, I rather they think and believe that, which isn't entirely true. I spend time with him when I can so, sure, let's go with that. Now that everything is ready, or as ready as it can be, I feel more confident with this so-called plan.

Freedom is right around the corner. It's so close I can taste it.

Come Friday night, I actually feel prepared. I'm not scared or nervous when heading to the warehouse. Everyone's already there, waiting. Seeing Kane puts my teeth on edge. I do my best not to glare at him. Every now and again I feel him glancing at me, hopefully from guilt, freaking jerk.

"Still haven't bailed on us yet?" Clover teases. "You really do know what's best for ya."

I don't bother that with a response, which only causes his grin to grow.

Thankfully Clover doesn't tease me anymore. He gets straight to the point and goes over our plans once again, reminding Mop Head to get the security down. Blondie and Clover will help me get past the security guards. I don't know how they plan to do that, but judging by the smiles they give each other, it isn't good. The two of them will keep watch while I head for the safe and the car will be out back. Should anyone start coming in they will bolt without me, like they've done before.

Clover keeps asking me to repeat the instructions over and over like he thinks I'm going to mess up, likely on purpose because of what I said last night. Too bad for him that the outcome is going to be much worse than messing up. They aren't getting their way. I won't let it happen.

"You better all be here at six am tomorrow mornin'. If one of ya are even a second late I'm gonna beat your ass, got it?" Clover asks and, surprisingly, doesn't look directly at me. Mop Head seems to be his target, who smiles sheepishly before Clover looks to me next. "Don't screw this up, Freak."

"You should be telling yourself that," I hiss, earning myself a giggle from Blondie and a very annoyed glare from Clover. "I can't get caught, remember?"

"True, last night was proof of that."

He said that purely to annoy me. I can tell by the smirk he's giving me. I roll my shoulders and shove my hands into my pants pockets.

"But it don't matter, come tomorrow you'll be beggin' us to keep ya around," Clover tacks on.

"I doubt it."

Because come tomorrow, their plan is going to blow up in their face.

~

Micah is feeling confident in himself again, isn't that great?! He's such a tough cookie, but is he tough enough to get out of this?

Chapter 14

Sitting in the car outside my house with Kane is awkward to say the least. Someone could cut the tension in the room, serve it on a platter and feed a family of five, it's that thick. My teeth are grinding while Kane is sitting quietly in the driver's seat. Someone put on the radio, this silence is deafening.

Our meeting with the others has long since ended. Now should be the time to go over the final details of our plan, simple as it may be, but I'm no longer certain Kane is trustworthy. Is he undercover like he said he was? Has this all been a lie? Maybe he's not on Clover's side but whoever his boss is and he's just seeing if this goes down well? If it does, maybe he'll be the next Clover in my life.

The thought makes my skin crawl.

"Your friends, none of them will be home tomorrow?" Kane finally asks, jumping to the plans rather than talking about the real issue at hand. It's funny he thinks I'll let that happen.

"Avoiding the topic, are you?" I hiss, facing Kane with a glare that he rolls his eyes at. "You realize after what happened I have no reason to trust you anymore?"

"Except you do because I told you in the beginning I will not risk ruining this operation for you," Kane answers without hesitation or guilt. He turns slightly in his seat, looking at me with those same cold eyes as the other night. Now I'm starting to wonder if he learned to do that just to get through his job, it would make sense. "I am helping in the ways that I can. Risking getting caught by Marsho, that could have ruined everything."

"I could have died!"

"And I'm truly sorry about that, but that doesn't change anything."

"No wonder you got this gig. With your attitude you fit in great with these assholes."

"Thank you. I work at it."

Oh, I hate that he kind of reminds me of myself.

I scoff. This is a waste of time. I don't know why I bothered coming. My trust in Kane has faltered and, once again, I feel completely alone. The weight of tomorrow, of my

fate, rests purely on my shoulders. There's disappointment and annoyance festering in my gut.

My hand is reaching for the door when Kane suddenly says, "Listen, Micah, I understand why you don't trust me all that well anymore."

"Bravo." I grab the handle just as the lock clicks. I'm about to open it but Kane has more to say and it actually makes me stop.

"I hate to say it again, but you don't have many other options."

My finger catches on the lock, resting there while sweat starts to form on my brow...because he's right. Don't have many other options? Correction, I don't have any other options. My life is truly blessed.

"Neither of us are in the best position to help each other, but I am honestly doing what I can. If you leave, I will go through with our original plan, I swear it. If you stay, we can discuss things further and make sure we have the best solution. It's up to you...but know that I really am on your side."

I want to believe that, not because it's Kane but because I need someone. Someone has to have my back, someone who knows what's going on even if Kane isn't all that helpful. It's better than nothing. It's better than this bitter feeling of loneliness consuming me like a raging virus.

My fingers pick at the lock, tap against the handle then fall into my lap. It seems my mind has already made itself up long before I considered it. I'm desperate. Desperate enough to put my life and the lives of others in the hands of someone I don't completely trust because I have nowhere else to go. This is the newest of lows for me, the lowest of lows. I can't even call it rock bottom. It's the bottom of the rock at the bottom.

"Mom is working for some big wedding so she'll be out of the house long before me, and my friends have plans so they'll be gone too," I finally answer Kane's initial question after sitting back in my seat.

"And you've come up with a sure fire way to keep everyone at the warehouse until the cops get there?"

"If sure fire way means beating the shit out of them, then yes."

Kane shakes his head. The furrowed brow tells me he's more nervous about this than I am so maybe, just maybe, he's telling the truth. Or my heart is wishing for it and my

mind is letting it win to save itself from insanity. I'm teetering on the edge here between silly hope and reality. Which will win, who knows, tune in next week to find out!

"You do realize they will have guns on them, right?" Kane asks and the question hits me hard enough to knock the breath from my lungs.

I bite my lip then give a hesitant nod.

"Invisible or not, they could land a shot. Have you considered that?"

My shoulders roll as, again, I nod. I didn't want to think about it. I rather not think about it. Sometimes when I close my eyes I can see it and that scares me.

"Obviously I can't be handing over a gun to you so here." Kane leans between the seats to rummage in the back. When he returns, he's holding a black taser that zaps loudly when he presses a button on the side. I jump then stare in confusion when he tries to hand it to me. "Take it. It's better than nothing. I promise this will knock at least one of them out."

"Hopefully that one isn't me," I joke, because humor in the face of possible death is cool let me tell ya.

The poor excuse of a joke earns me an eye roll from Kane. Still, I take the taser and hold it in my grasp, too nervous to sit it in my lap. The fact that he's giving this to me is making the trust rebuild itself just a smidge, like one brick on top of the two that are still there but who's counting?

Humming, I say, "Listen, I know this plan sucks–"

"It's the worst."

"But, like you said, we can't risk anyone else finding out about me, or you for that matter. I've managed to keep myself safe even in fights where I've been outnumbered so...I can do this."

I don't know who I'm trying to convince.

Kane runs his hand over his head. His bottom lip is pulled between his teeth. We're both worried, that's understandable, but we both know this is the only route we can really take. The trust isn't fully there. The hope isn't really either, but the fact remains that we have to be confident and we have to do this. There are no other options.

So, with a heavy sigh, he says, "I've already made sure they left all the plans at the warehouse, even without evidence of the robbery they have warrants out for their arrest so they'll be taken in easily."

"And if they aren't?" Because if they're let out afterwards, I'll be the one they come after. Kane will be in the clear while I'll have a giant target on my back.

"Trust me, they've caused enough trouble. Their crimes are a mile long."

"So you think they'll get locked up for good?"

Kane shrugs and gives it to me honestly, "It could be for life or it could be for ten years. This is something you will have to consider, Micah."

Something I have to consider without telling my mom...or, well, I suppose I will have to at some point. I am not excited for that lecturing nor the possibility of my dark future. Maybe I should move to Canada or England?

"Make sure to call the cops before starting. I got a track phone for you to use. Get there early, seal off every exit you can after they go in and tie them up if possible." Kane leans into the back of the car once more then hands me a bag full of locks, zip ties, and the track phone he talked about. He instructs me to use the locks on the outside of every door and window I can. They likely won't do much against guns but it'll give more time to disarm them.

Without much thought, I send Kane a smile. He prepared a lot more than I thought. I wonder if he would have given me this had I left? But it doesn't matter now because I have it and, honestly, it boosts my confidence. This is going to happen. It's going to work.

"Thanks...for all of this."

"I'd say it's no problem, but honestly, it's been awful." Kane chuckles causing me to do the same.

"It has definitely sucked."

"Listen, I still have no clue how you are the way...you are." Kane waves his hand up and down in my direction. "And sometimes I still don't believe it, but I really do hope this plan works and you can go back to your normal life. I promise to keep my eyes and ears open for any talk about you and I'll do my best to keep it a secret."

"Can I ask why?"

Kane tilts his head to the side in confusion. "What do you mean?"

"Why are you keeping it a secret? Say you manage to bring this group down, why not tell everyone about me afterwards?"

"Why would I do that, even if there was a chance they'd believe me?"

"Fame, money, recognition, I don't know. Imagine going to the government and telling them you met a kid that can go invisible. They'd be all over that."

"Wow, you really do think so little of me." Kane frowns causing me to squirm uncomfortably under his gaze.

I wouldn't say I think little of him. I don't completely trust him, but considering what he's risking...I definitely don't get it. I've always been under the impression that someone would rat me out if given the chance. I am a dream specimen, like an alien, another species, something they'd want to poke and stab at to see how I work. Maybe I'd be an attraction at a show or something for the military to test. There will be bottles of "invisible juice" that the military can drink to invade other countries or topple governments! Who really knows, but the fact remains that I am different, the kind of different that could earn someone a big profit.

Money is a powerful thing, I know that all too well now.

"I see no reason I should tell anyone. What's so bad about having an invisible boy protecting our streets?" Kane asks.

"Because that invisible boy is a freak."

"You're different, Micah, that doesn't make you a freak. If anything, it only proves how much you deserve it. You could do terrible things with your abilities, instead you're helping people and not getting even a hint of recognition for it. I think we're damn lucky to have someone like you around."

I don't know what to say to that. So much praise, it's not something I'm used to so I end up sitting there in silence. Kane doesn't seem to mind, if anything, he finds it funny because he smiles. Rather than continue on with that discussion though, he changes it back to the issue at hand.

"Milton and the others will likely get annoyed with you being late after five to ten minutes so I will call ten after six to let them know your mom has gone missing. Once that happens, the exits need to have been sealed off and you can take them down. I suggest getting Talley out of the way first. She may not look it, but she can be a real handful."

Kane continues to give me some suggestions on what to do. I listen with rapt attention until we're finished and I'm stepping out of the car. As I'm walking to my front door, I can't help but feel anxious. My muscles are deciding now would be a great time to stop functioning. I'm surprised I'm even still standing. My heart is racing a mile a minute and everything has become a blur in my vision. I barely make it inside before I'm leaning my weight against the door.

I went from not trusting Kane at all to listening to him in less than a few minutes. In a way, I feel gullible, in another I'm relieved. Relieved that he has helped in whatever way he could, regardless of what happened at Marsho's. Truly, I do get why he didn't tag along and, yes, it still bugs me that he didn't, but...we have different objectives. It's a miracle he's helping me at all so I guess I'm just grateful.

Mom is upstairs taking a shower. I hear the water running. While she's there, I run up to my room where I practice with the taser, trying to see if I can keep it invisible while using it. Doesn't work, every time I use it I, and the taser, reappear. Sadly, once Mom finishes her shower I have to wait for her to go downstairs to try using it again. Don't really want her to see me using a taser.

My phone goes off. It's a message from Leo asking what I'm up to. There's a brief moment where I ask myself if I want to see him. Tonight I should be trying to focus, really trying to make sure I know what the hell I'm doing tomorrow morning. At the same time, isn't now the best time to go see him?

It's morbid to think about, but there is a possibility that everything could mess up tomorrow and I'll find myself dead in a ditch. The thought makes me sick. My stomach is churning and it's hard to breathe. Sitting on my bed, I feel my skin break out with goosebumps. There's this sudden urge to call the whole thing off, just accept my fate and rob the damn bank, but I know it's stupid and it goes away in an instant.

Looking at my phone, I read over Leo's text before claiming I'll be on his back porch. I don't wait for a response, instead, going downstairs immediately to put on my shoes. Mom is watching TV, she looks ready to ask if I wanna join until she sees me walking out the backdoor. I imagine she's grinning, probably already aware of where I'm going.

Just as I take a seat on the steps of Leo's porch, he comes out the door wearing a confused expression. When he sees me sitting there, that confusion grows, but he sits beside me anyways. I'm reminded of our near kiss the other day due to the close proximity. Our arms are brushing and his ears are slightly red, likely because he's thinking of the same thing.

"How does it feel to be a free man?" Leo asks. I'm confused until he laughs. "Today was your last day of after school."

"It wasn't too bad. I slept through most of it."

Which is a lie because how could I sleep while knowing I had to meet up with some psychopaths to plan the robbery of a bank, but hey, I'm not telling Leo that. Secrets are sexy, right? That's a thing in, like, romance books or something? I don't know but it's a thing, I swear.

Leaning back, I grab the soccer ball sitting in the corner of the porch. The nerves are seriously getting to me. Suddenly, I want to tell Mom how much I love her, tell Beckett he isn't a complete idiot and I honestly love his dumb ass and would seriously miss him if he were gone, give Misty a big hug and ask her to take good care of him, kiss Leo senseless and ask him to go on a date right here and now. Seems I already have an answer to the, *"if the world was ending tomorrow, what would you do?"* question.

I'd spend every second of it with my loved ones since, right now, I don't know if my world will end tomorrow or not.

"Is something wrong?" Leo asks and I don't really blame him for it. I'm acting weird, I know it so it must be obvious to Leo too. He's watching me with a concerned expression, how very Leo of him.

"Mm, I'm a bit tired."

"Why'd you come out here then? You should get some rest if you need it."

"I wanted to see you."

I smile at the red hue that overtakes Leo's face immediately. He clears his throat nervously, squirms a bit, then grumbles beneath his breath, "What are you trying to do?"

"I'm not trying to do anything. I'm only telling the truth."

"Mhm."

"Sounds like you don't believe me."

"I can't imagine why.

"What? Did you not want to see me?" I whisper, smirking at the sudden panic on Leo's face. He's so easy to rile up. Am I a bit twisted for enjoying it? Most likely, but that's just my personality.

Brushing his hand beneath his nose, Leo looks away and says, "You're more sly than I ever thought you'd be."

"Are you disappointed?"

"Don't know yet." But Leo sends me a smile before lightly nudging my arm with his, which has me nudging right back. Being with Leo helps the nerves dwindle enough to let me breathe again. I'm glad I decided to come over. My mind is taking a break. I'll be able to think more clearly after this.

I continue flipping the soccer ball in my hands since they can't manage to keep themselves still. Leo watches me with that warm smile of his. Each time I glance his way he gets this look, like when a puppy realizes it's getting the attention it wants.

I can't help but snort, which has Leo asking, "What?"

"You're like a dog."

"Thanks?"

"Or maybe you are the human embodiment of the heart eye emoji right now."

Leo whacks the soccer ball out of my hand causing it to roll across the yard. I chuckle while he gets up, likely as an excuse to go get it so I can't see that his cheeks have yet to change from their red hue. Watching him hop down the steps to go retrieve the ball only proves my point and Leo regrets his decision immediately when I ask, "Do you want to play fetch?"

He flips me the bird. Ok, I get that, but he walked into it. I would be a fool to let such an opportunity pass me by.

Leo tosses the ball into the air and bounces it off his knee then starts kicking it around with his feet. Soccer is not a sport I have ever played or probably even have the

coordination to play. Leo, on the other hand, is incredibly good at it. I swear I can't keep up watching his feet move. It's going to give me a headache.

"So, what did I do to earn such an unusual visit?" Leo asks out of the blue, successfully breaking me from my thoughts.

I hum and look at his smile while kicking the soccer ball around. I can see his dimples. Part of me is a bit jealous. Must be nice to be a chipper ball of sunshine all the time, or it sucks completely, how would I know?

"Had a rough day, detention and all," I answer, once again, managing to be a bit honest while lying through my teeth. Before Leo can respond to that though, I blurt out a question that I would like to hear his answer even if I'm not entirely sure as to why. Maybe it has to do with what Clover said; *you're not the hero anymore.*

Or maybe his opinion matters more than I'm willing to admit.

"What do you think of heroes?"

"Heroes?" Leo hums while still kicking the ball around his feet like he's trying to set the next record for who even knows what.

"Yeah, like, what is a hero?"

"Oh, that's easy!" Leo chirps, which has me cocking a brow at how quick he is to give a list. "All first responders, charity workers, animal rescues, someone helping an old lady cross the street, loving parents, an older sibling helping with studies, just anyone and everyone who does good for others rather than always themselves."

With that big smile, Leo seems very proud of his answer while I'm left a bit confused.

"So, just about everyone is a hero in your eyes?"

"Pretty much. The movies always make them out to be super, these crazy beings with powers, and we start to think you have to do something extreme to be a hero. In reality, it's the small things. A good deed is a good deed, no matter how big or small, you're a hero for doing it."

I'd love to believe that. The world Leo believes in seems ideal. If others felt the same the world would be a better place.

"But what if you do something bad?" I ask.

Leo raises a brow. I don't know what sort of face I'm making, but it must be some kind of upsetting because now the boy is frowning yet it doesn't take him long to answer.

"Everyone will do bad things in their lives, sometimes on purpose, sometimes unwillingly, sometimes they don't even know about it. There's no such thing as an only good person. There's just people, and people are a little bit of everything, which is pretty cool, don't you think?"

"Yeah," I chuckle, shaking my head at the sudden warmth building in my chest because of a few sweet words from Leo that he didn't even mean to give to me. I stare at my hands now twiddling together in my lap. "Yeah, I guess that's true."

"You know, sometimes I don't get you, Micah," Leo suddenly says, bringing my gaze back to him.

I lean my head to the side. Leo's watching the soccer ball at his feet even when I ask, "What don't you get?"

"Mm, I don't completely know to be honest."

I snort.

"You're normally really blunt. You don't have an issue saying what's on your mind and yet—" Leo stops then sets his foot atop the ball while looking right at me. Although I know my face is apathetic, it feels like it doesn't matter because Leo has already figured it out. "It feels like there's one big secret always on your mind that you never say, and it has me wondering why."

Way to hit the nail right on the head there. Leo has managed to pick that up quick, and I wonder if it's because he has been with me during this whole ordeal. Either way, it doesn't matter because that big secret of mine is going to remain a secret, as long as I can help it.

"The only secret on my mind right now is how good I think you look in your soccer uniform, but well, I guess that isn't a secret anymore."

Leo purses his lips, obviously a little annoyed with me for evading while also shy about my admission. Kicking the ball back up with his foot, Leo grabs it then grumbles, "Changing the subject."

"We were talking about secrets and it was a secret, but honestly, your ass looks great in those shorts. I was half tempted to jump you at that practice."

And the soccer ball is launched at my head. I barely dodge it, causing the thing to hit against the house then bounce onto the porch. Smirking, I turn to look at Leo and his pouty lips.

"What? It was a compliment." I chuckle.

After hopping off the steps I walk over to Leo, who still looks curious about his kind of unspoken question regarding my so-called big secret. I do feel bad about not telling him. I wish for nothing more than to talk...but that's a lot easier said than done. Maybe one day I'll tell him. One day I'd like to tell him, but now is not the time.

"I'll see you tomorrow," I say more than ask because a part of me hopes that saying is true: you get what you put into the world. So, if I keep pushing for our date to happen then it will, childish hopes to get me through the trouble that is to come.

Leo hums. "See you tomorrow."

With that, I lean up to press a chaste kiss to his cheek. It's warm, it's sweet, and it ends in the blink of an eye, quite literally. Leo's expression is priceless, they always are; with an ear to ear smile that he tries to hide by lowering his head. I saw it though and it's what I really needed to see.

I don't say anything to him, only give a quick wave goodbye that he returns. It isn't until I'm on my porch that I hear his back door swing open and shut behind him. I linger there for a moment, standing outside my door watching Leo's house like I'm expecting him to come running back out. Obviously he doesn't because he's so certain he'll see me tomorrow. We'll go on our date, I'll flirt with him the entire time, we'll have a meal afterwards and live our perfectly normal teenage lives; that's what he thinks and that's what I want. But I know that may not be the case. The only thing on my mind right now is a single question;

Will tomorrow be the tomorrow I want or will it be my last?

~

So Micah and Kane have made up after what happened. What do you think about what Leo said concerning what makes a hero? Will Micah and Leo have their date?! Or is Micah doomed to become a boy whose powers will be abused?

Chapter 15

4:12am

I leave the house. The morning air is cool against my skin. Mom left only a few minutes ago to start work extra early. I was obviously awake. I didn't get a wink of sleep, told her I just happened to hear her get up so I said goodbye, gave her a kiss, hugged her tighter than usual then watched her leave. My stomach has been jumping like it's a job ever since.

The lights are off at Leo's house. I linger outside his yard for a moment staring, just staring. A lump forms in my throat. My hands are shaking, but I take a deep breath and move on. If I stay, I may back out of my plan. It feels like every moment is leading to that, leading to giving in because the tension is rising, the nerves are barbaric and every second feels like my last.

The bus arrives and the driver is confused to see me; a teen awake so early on a weekend, but says nothing. There are a few others on the bus, likely commuters for weekend work. A few of them give sympathetic looks when I get off about two blocks away from the warehouse, probably more people thinking I'm some drugged up kid. That's fine. They can think that. They should think that. The truth is much worse and I can only hope they don't see me again on the news, a poor teen arrested for robbery, or worse, dead. The thought leaves my throat drier than the Sahara desert.

I hide, vanish, then continue my journey unseen while keeping my eyes peeled for the others. There's no one in sight, not even at the warehouse when I arrive. Stepping into the open space is what hammers it in for me. I'm doing this. I either succeed or fail. This can go two ways and, if I mess this up even a little, then it's over. I'm over.

It's almost scary how calm I'm starting to feel. My hands are steady. The sweat is no longer dripping down my cheeks. Each move is calculated, clean and quiet. A ninja would be jealous of my calm right now.

The only sound comes from that of the occasional vehicle outside followed by a few birds that flutter around their nests atop the roofs. I'm locking the back doors ahead of time, making sure to leave the main door alone so they can come in. Each window is thoroughly checked and secure. Most have locks on the inside so it'll at least stall them before ripping one open. I go over every inch of every single thing, looking for any hidden weapons, checking if they planned on backstabbing me, but there's nothing.

This is it. This is their plan and I'm gonna mess it up either way.

It's not even five thirty by the time I've finished everything yet I don't feel restless. I continue checking, continue looking out and there's nothing on my mind. It's blank, so blank it's almost scary but I'm grateful for it, otherwise, I would be panicking by now.

I end up waiting outside watching the streets. The world is moving in slow motion. When the wind blows trash across the road it seems to suspend in the air then drop. The few that walk the streets are taking long, hesitant steps while their voices muddle together. My own breathing feels slowed.

This is the moment I've seen on TV and in the movies, the point just before all hell breaks loose. When the breath is caught and we sit in our movie seats waiting for the inevitable. No one touches their popcorn or pop. They simply watch and wonder, when will it happen?

I never thought I'd have a movie moment and, if I did, I would prefer something different.

A cop car drives past and it's the first one I've seen since I arrived. They don't come often and that worries me. How long will it take for them to arrive after the call? Should I have done a test run prior to find out? It's too late now. Can I knock the others out or restrain them in time? Once they hear those sirens they'll scatter and there's only one of me.

But such thoughts are put on hold when I realize; *it's time.*

The getaway car is heading this way. I can only assume they're all in it when the vehicle drives past the wired fence. While they park the car in an unseen location, I return to the warehouse front entrance to lie in wait. Now my heart is beating so loudly in my ears that it hurts. The taser is in my hand, remaining locks needed in the other, zip ties in one pocket and a phone in the other. Their voices are growing closer. Each sound tickles my ears.

Then I finally see them.

Mop Head, Blondie, Clover and, the one I have never seen until now, Gena, are heading this way. Gena is a thin girl with long and scraggly brown hair. Her wide green eyes are like bugs', practically bulging out of her head. I think it's safe to say she's done her fair share of narcotics and it shows.

The four are speaking quietly to one another until Blondie lets out a loud laugh that has Mop Head whacking her over the back of the head. She quiets just as the four pass me by, completely unaware that I've been here for over an hour. My eyes catch a glimpse of a gun barely visible under Clover's hoodie. So I know he has one. Although I expected it, my breath hitches. There really will be guns. When I blink, I swear my eyes are shut longer than usual and I can hear the gunshot, see the blood then my eyes open and I've returned to reality. But the possibility of my future lingers in the back of my mind like a bad taste.

Blondie obviously has a pocket knife. I've seen and felt it. I'm not sure about the other two. Kane said to take out Blondie first, but wouldn't it be a better idea to get rid of those with a gun? Blondie can't catch me if she doesn't see me. A gun is far more frightening.

"When do you suppose the freak will get 'ere?" Mop Head asks with a low chuckle just as I squeeze in behind them before the door shuts. I lock it from the inside while quietly doing the same to the others. None are even looking my way so they don't see a lock magically appear on the doors. The large openness of the warehouse helps with sneaking.

"Bet he'll be late," Blondie answers. "He's such a lil pussy, probably cryin' in his room as we speak!"

Oh, I am going to enjoy this.

"S-Suppose he rats on us though?" Gena asks timidly. I glance back just in time to see Clover glare at her. She bows her head immediately.

"He ain't gonna even think about it. Kane is watchin' his mom and got the address to his friend's house. He'd be an idiot to try anythin'," Clover says far too confidently.

It's actually helping my nerves because all I feel now is this immense rage, this desire to make their stupid plan blow up in their stupid faces. They're going to regret the day they ever messed with me.

"What are we gonna do after this? When the boss finds out he'll wanna see the freak, suppose he'll let us work with him some more?" Mop Head asks while I head to the far end of the warehouse in the corner. Their voices are softer here. I can make the phone call without them noticing so I wait patiently (not really) for Kane's call.

"Does it matter? Let us work with 'im or not, we're bound to finally get recognized. He'll love us for bringin' this kid in. He's the perfect thief material."

I bite my lip. Although it was obvious that Clover's "boss" would meet me, should this go the way he wants it, it's scarier hearing the truth from him. They planned to hand me over like some art project to be sold. I can't imagine what would have happened if Kane didn't show up. I can't imagine surviving if this had gone the way he wanted. The life he and his boss would want me to live, it's not one I could accept.

Speaking of Kane though, I check my phone to find it's eight after six. Clover is looking at his own phone, seeming to be annoyed with my absence. That's proven correct when Blondie chimes in, claiming that she was right and should have bet on me. While they're arguing amongst themselves, I take that as the time to call the cops.

"911, what's your emergency?"

"There's some group stationed out in a warehouse on Schaeffer Street. They have guns," I whisper while keeping my eyes on Clover. None have heard me because they haven't so much as glanced in my general direction.

"Please do not engage with them. Where are you now?"

"I'm across the street—oh god, I-I think they saw me. They're coming this way. I have to go, please, please send help," I hiss as frantically as I can. The dispatcher tries to keep me on the line but I'm quick to hang up. Regardless of whether he sends someone, I imagine there will be gun shots in a few moments and that is a sure fire way to call for the cops.

Kane's call follows my own just as I'm making my way towards them. Even knowing they can't see me, I'm so quiet that even I question whether I'm moving. One second they seem so far and the next I'm on top of them.

"Kane, what's goin'—" Clover's brows furrow in obvious frustration. "What do you mean she's gone?!"

I don't know what face Mop Head or Blondie are making. Their backs are facing me, but Gena is already frantically digging at her hair and jumping up and down. Now my hands are definitely shaking, but my eyes are locked on Clover. He has the gun.

This is it. It's now or never.

"You were supposed to watch her! How did she just get away? Damn it, go to that brats __"

Then Clover's eyes widen with realization.

He's reaching to his side and I know it's too late to move around the table to get him first. The next option is the very person Kane told me to knock out originally. I ram the taser into Blondie's back. Sure enough, the moment it goes off I appear behind her and all eyes are on me.

They always say the world feels like it's going in slow motion, but whoever they are, they're lying.

It's pure adrenaline in a second. Everything is a blur of motion, sounds and smell that I don't know what's happening until Blondie's unconscious body hits the ground. Clover's gun is nearly pointed directly at me while Mop Head has reached for his; hidden behind his back under his jacket. I disappear a second before Clover fires off the first shot. I feel the air from the bullet whizz past my arm.

The world's a twist of colors, a complete mess of shouts and orders tangled together while my mind desperately tries to focus on the task at hand.

Gena is bolting for the doors. She finds them locked, struggling with it while shouting, "He locked the doors!"

"What the hell are ya doin', Micah?" Clover shouts. I'm shocked he used my name. The growl in his voice is enough to know he plans to kill me because of this. "Think this through. Do ya honestly think you can stop all of us? You think your mom can hide forever? Kane's on his way to get those stupid friends of yours right now!"

Kane. There's still a slight possibility he isn't on my side, that this is all a ploy, but I can only hope he's with me. So, for this moment, I'll continue thinking I have the upper hand.

Mop Head and Clover are looking for me. The disadvantage is they now know I'm here. My foot happens to hit against a grocery bag on the floor. Immediately Mop Head fires then my footsteps echo in the empty space. Neither can tell where I'm at so, with a single look to one another, the two start unloading bullet after bullet in no particular direction.

Movies have always made action scenes obscenely loud, but now I know they aren't loud enough. Each shot echoes stronger than the last, so intense that I can barely hear sirens in the distance, but I got a job to do. I can't focus on the coming headache so I make my way to Gena, already long gone from the firing range of those two idiots.

Gena's unlocking one of the windows. She jumps out, which is a dumb idea since I'm right behind her. When the taser makes contact with her back, she spazzes out and drops quietly, much to my luck. She's the first that I manage to tie up, leaving her zip tied to the

door handle outside. Blondie passed out, likely because of where I got her, while Gena is more in pain, moaning and crying softly while trying to regain her movement, but it's too late.

"Talley, wake the hell up!" Clover shouts from inside.

I'm already jumping back in through the window while Mop Head is keeping his eyes peeled. My foot hits the floor. He hears it. I bolt when his gun is pointed at the line of windows.

"Did he follow Gena?!" Mop Head asks while running to said window. I'm right next to him.

Looking back, I find Clover trying to shake Talley awake. The taser is no good with them both having a gun. When Mop Head leans out the window to check for Gena, I reach up and slam the window down on his head, twice.

The man shouts and drops the gun, which I proceed to kick as hard as I can. It goes skidding across the floor, but Clover uses the commotion to find out where I am. He must have half a brain because he manages to run across the room and tackle me. I'm surprised he didn't fire the gun, seems he cares about his friends more than I thought.

Mop Head is still dazed, stumbling back with a few drops of blood trickling down his temple. Clover is on top of me. My heart races when I see the gun in his hand. I manage to grab hold of his wrist before he can point it at me. He fires off a shot that goes through the door.

First, my ear rings so loud that I squint my eyes. The world is spinning. My vision's blurry. I don't know if I'm struggling against Clover or not. Then reality returns to me. My eyes widen in fear upon seeing the bullet hole through the door. When only light comes in, I know that Gena wasn't hit.

Am I an idiot for not wanting them to die during this debacle? Probably, but I rather be an idiot than a murderer.

"Don't be an idiot, Freak!" Clover shouts as if on cue.

I end up head butting him. Blood squirts out of his nose before I manage to flip us over and send my fist into his face. My ears are still ringing so I'm unsure if the punch broke anything but it stunned him.

I'm reaching for the gun that he's barely clutching in his grasp. He shouts in shock when I manage to push it away only a smidge, enough for me to use the taser on him. Much like Gena, Clover twists and grunts from the pain. However, his lasts only a second or so before Mop Head's arms wrap around me from behind. While he's pulling me away, I quickly kick the gun from Clover's grasp. It, too, skids across the floor.

My legs are kicking violently in an attempt to get out of Mop Head's hold. It only tightens. Clover is trying to move. His legs and arms are twitching. His body can't seem to catch up with reality. Mop Head can see me now thanks to the taser and refuses to let go, for good reason. The taser ends up dropping out of my hands. I grab his arms and attempt to pry myself free. It doesn't work so I use my head again, banging it back against Mop Head's jaw once, twice, and a third time until it finally works.

My head seems to have a permanent throbbing sensation while Mop Head is bleeding from his mouth. His teeth are stained red. His lip is busted. The man curses when I vanish before his squinted eyes. He must expect me to go for the taser because he runs for it, but I'm already sending my knee into his groin. Mop Head lurches forward but doesn't hesitate to throw a punch that lands against my side. Then he's pushing me like a raging bull. My feet stumble. We fall to the ground in a mess of limbs and curses. The lack of concentration causes me to reappear. I can't concentrate with all this commotion. My head is throbbing, ears ringing, legs shaking, everything is too much. Am I even breathing?

Instinct is kicking in. There's no thought. Just movement. Punch, kick, bite, scratch, whatever I have to do is what I do without considering the consequences.

Mop Head's smirking when he punches me in the gut then the face. I grab his hair, using the grasp to pull his face down against the floor. Next, I push him off me, disappear again, then punch him like it's my new bloody religion once he's on his feet. My fists are throbbing. The knuckles are red and bleeding. Each hit makes my arm shake, practically turning it to jello.

When he falls back to the ground in another daze, that's when I flip him over and zip tie his wrists in a flash. He isn't pleased, especially when I drag his fat ass over to Blondie's. All this commotion and pain makes me start to flicker on and off like a dying light bulb. I feel sick. But, I manage to quickly tie Blondie's wrists to Mop Head's. Even if he tries to run with her they won't get far. To make things even better, the cops are here. Cars are peeling into the lot.

Is this working? Am I actually going to do this?

Quick footsteps echo in the room. I have enough time to look over and find Clover coming at me with a knife. He swings the blade, narrowly missing me as I stumble back.

The cops are closer, their footsteps seem so near. Quickly, I disappear, putting all my concentration into staying unseen. Clover hears the cops too and he's already unlocking one of the windows to get out the back.

I grab him from behind. My fingers twist into the shirt before I rip him to the floor. He blindly reaches out with his knife. The blade manages to cut at my leg, not deep but enough to get me to hiss. Then he's on his feet again, swinging like a mad man in each and every direction but it's too late.

The cops are here. They're pushing their way in through the doors. Clover is reaching for the window. They're already going around back. When the doors finally burst open, someone shouts, "Drop the knife and put your hands in the air now!"

I know I won. I did it.

And looking at the twisted scowl on Clover's face, he's aware of it too.

Somehow, it feels like he knows he's looking right at me. Our eyes meet. He's glaring. I'm smiling. This stupid plan of his, it's over and done. This mess I got myself into, it's over, and I take great joy watching an officer cuff him. Even more so when Mop Head starts going off, "Listen, we were just trying to defend ourselves!"

"Sure, sure," an officer says with a roll of his eyes.

"There was a kid here with us! Uh, his name's Micah, he's a freak! He's an invisible boy!"

"Invisible? That's a new one!" Some of the police cackle while Clover hisses at Mop Head to shut up. Blondie is half awake when she's being dragged out. I'm not sure about Gena, doesn't matter though because I've got things to do, places to be, freedom to enjoy.

The officers are already going over the area, looking at the plans and realizing what they were trying to do. My name isn't mentioned anywhere, only the time Mop Head said Micah, but judging by how crazy he sounds, the cops aren't going to look into it.

I follow them out of the warehouse to the police vehicles where Clover is shoved into the back. While the cops' backs are turned, I fog up the glass with my breath. Clover starts screaming all forms of curse words when all I draw is a smiley face on the car window.

"Just wait until I'm out ya dumb son of a bitch! Fuckin' wait!" He screams, spit spewing out of his red face but I'm not all that scared.

Actually, the only thing I'm scared about is being late for my date, or worse, the fact that I'm going to show up looking like I have just been in a fight.

There's no time to stick around. I'm running for the bus stop. By now it's not even six thirty. The cops must not have really headed our way till the guns were fired, either way, it's not as late as it felt it should be. My entire body is exhausted and aching from the whole situation. Although it's over, I know it's over, it feels like it isn't. I feel this nagging sensation when I get on the bus that someone is watching me. I wonder if this paranoia will ever go away.

By the time I get off the bus, I'm restless. After what happened I expected to be thinking of all sorts of things except I'm not. I'm focused on the date, on Leo, and I think that's my brain's way of protecting itself. What I went through is...a lot, and I may never get to talk about it with anyone. I can't exactly talk to a therapist about my invisibility or my mom about this whole ordeal so...yeah, I think I'm protecting myself and I'm ok with that.

Time to go back to a normal life or, well, as normal as I'm ever going to get. I'm more than ok with that now, being the nobody that's secretly a somebody. Life is so much easier that way and my loved ones are far safer. Besides, it's never been about recognition. It's never been about everyone knowing my name. It's always been about helping because I can in the special way that I can and that's pretty cool, right?

Funny how a week can change so much.

Kane never messages me afterwards. I'm not surprised. Actually, I won't be surprised if I never hear from him again. The deed is done and he can't risk being caught. All I can do is be grateful for his help so, once I'm home, I get rid of my bag. I make up some excuse that I lost it in order to tell mom later. I just want to be thorough so the track phone, locks, zip ties, and the taser are dumped too. Half of me says to keep the taser but...I can't. All of it is put into the trash and taken outside.

Then it's time to try and clean up. I look in the bathroom mirror and I'm not sure how I feel about what I see. My curly brown hair has flattened from the sweat, sticking to the sides of my slightly bruised cheek. My right eye is going to have a nice shiner come tomorrow, if not tonight. Taking off my shirt, I find a few bruises littered there as well as the cut on my leg.

I'm lucky. Super lucky. Yesterday I was considering being found dead in a ditch; having some unsolved crime show featuring me and the entire internet pondering over what

happened to that Micah kid.

Today I'm going on a date after managing to stop a bank robbery.

I stopped a bank robbery. Please, let that sink in. What kind of life am I even living? Reality TV doesn't even have this kind of crazy.

Such thoughts make me laugh, laugh so hard that my sides start to ache and my body feels so light it's unreal. Part of me is almost happy that this happened today because I'm in such a damn good mood come the time to meet up with Leo. The only issue that arises when I step out of my house to find the boy waiting patiently on the sidewalk is...

Leo's eyes widen when he sees the bruises on my face.

What am I supposed to tell him?

"Micah, what the hell happened?" Leo asks, rushing up the steps to meet me while taking hold of my face. I hiss before he quickly apologizes. Still, he doesn't let go, only caresses my cheek with his thumb and I'm fine with that.

Rather than answer him, I give the boy a thorough check out. He's dressed pretty nicely in some fitted jeans and a nice red top with a black jean jacket. I can see there's some gel in his hair to keep it in place. Can't really tease him about working on his look because I tried to tame my hair as well. Still, I appreciate the silent gesture.

"I left early this morning to get some toilet paper." The look on Leo's face tells me he's already smelling bullshit, but I continue with a huge grin, "And I saw these guys trying to rob a bank...so I stopped them."

Yeah, he obviously doesn't believe me.

Rolling his eyes, Leo drops his hands to his sides and says, "Fine, don't tell me."

"Hey, you said it yourself, I'm a silent protector."

Leo purses his lips. The boy obviously wants to ask more but doesn't. He steps back instead and says, "Well, come on, *silent protector* , or we're going to miss the bus."

With that, Leo hops right off the porch.

Shaking my head, I chuckle and follow after him, quickly holding his hand in mine. Leo doesn't say anything, only smiles bashfully while intertwining our fingers together. He

swings our arms between us once for good measure. His hands are warm, mine probably are too.

Looks like I got the tomorrow I wanted.

~

MICAH DID IT! YAY! The plan worked and he's finally free of their grasp, or is he? ;D But no time to think about that, the date is upon us! How is this going to go? ^^

Chapter 16

On the bus ride Leo sits by the window with his hands in his lap. He got too nervous once there were more people around and I can't necessarily blame him for that. He's not exactly announcing his sexuality to the world yet so I'm fine sitting next to him. Some might say the silence between us is awkward, but I'd argue it's unbelievably comforting. Although neither of us say a word, Leo will look at me from time to time and smile when he realizes he has my attention. Then he'll look away all giddy and act like he wasn't caught staring at me.

It takes about thirty minutes to get to our stop. When the bus comes to a halt I step up and allow Leo to get out then hop off the bus before me. The tickets are in his pocket, which he's digging through now before holding them up with excitement.

"Ah, wait, are you hungry? Do you want to grab something to eat before we go in?" Leo asks. The zoo entrance is right ahead of us, but looking around, I see a few restaurants nearby.

"Probably cheaper to eat out here."

Leo nods then looks from side to side in an attempt to find a place. I watch on in amusement, wondering if he'll have the guts to suggest one or wait patiently for me.

When he ends up just smiling and staring at me, I take that as a time to point to a random restaurant and ask, "How about that one?"

"Ok, cool! Yeah, we can...we can go to that one." Leo looks ready to slap himself in the face. I'm half expecting him to, instead, his smile falters and he walks robotically to the crosswalk. Oh, today is going to be a good day, I can tell. Hold it in, Micah. Contain yourself. Be a bit nicer than usual. We don't want to mentally scar him.

So the two of us waltz over to the restaurant. I hold the door open, watching Leo duck in with the same robotic movements. His reactions make me try and remember if Leo has ever "dated" anyone before. Thinking back on it, I remember once or twice Leo talking to a girl and rumors going around school that they were together, which obviously weren't true. But I wonder if Leo has ever met up with a guy and, if not, does this count as his "official" first date? Because, damn, if that's the case then I really have to be on my best behavior.

Wow, suddenly it feels easier to rob a bank.

A waiter takes us to our table where we order our drinks then are left with our menus. I'm reminded of the time Leo asked me for advice with the way he's hiding behind his menu again. Grinning, I set mine aside and wait patiently for Leo to decide. He remains hidden until our waiter returns to take our orders, walking away only to be stopped by a waitress.

Before Leo, or I, can even speak, the girl asks, "Did you hear about the cops nabbing some crazies that were planning to rob a bank today?"

"What?" Our waiter asks just as Leo turns in our booth to listen in. I act like I don't hear any of it.

"Yeah, apparently someone called it in, but they don't know who. There were plans and everything, it's all over the news already!"

Now Leo is staring at me with wide eyes, likely remembering what I told him earlier. I'm sipping on my drink, glancing at him with innocently blinking eyes. I can tell he wants to ask then probably thinks it's crazy and gives in. Still, the look remains, like he's starting to think the silent protector title may actually be true. If he only knew.

"So, did you have to buy tickets early for the zip line?" I ask, deciding to start conversation rather than allow Leo to consider simmering in his thoughts. The last thing I want is for him to actually try and piece together what happened, though I doubt he could. I still can't really believe it, or the fact that it's over.

"Hmm? Oh, yeah, I already got them!" Leo announces happily.

"Not scared of heights, are you?"

"Mm, not like that?"

I cock a brow.

"I've never had an issue with roller coasters or anything but...once my parents and I went to Kinzua bridge, which has this glass window that you can stand on allowing you to see the ground below. It's, like, a 300 foot drop!" Leo throws his hands up like that somehow expresses how high of a drop that is. "I couldn't even walk on it, the idea of the glass shattering—" Leo shakes his hands rapidly then shivers before asking, "What about you? I'm assuming you're not scared of heights.

I shake my head while leaning back in the booth. "Nah, death would probably be quick anyways."

My answer doesn't seem to please Leo judging by his pursed lips. "What are you scared of then? Zombies? That would probably be a long and painful death."

"Being taken advantage of," I answer without hesitation, which has Leo staring at me wide-eyed. Seems he didn't expect an answer so quickly or honestly, but after what has happened even before this whole ordeal, the answer came easily, although I can't share all the reasons as to why that's the case. "First boyfriend was a sack of shit that cheated on me, multiple times, although I did everything I could to keep us happy so...I hate when others walk all over me because they know that they can."

"It's hard to imagine anyone taking advantage of you," Leo admits. "You're so blunt, figured you'd tell them off."

"Yeah, you'd figure."

Well, some I wished to, but they kinda had a serious advantage. We have seen how that turned out for them though, even if I can't gloat about it with anyone other than myself. What a pity. Guess I'll have to buy myself a cake for a lonely celebration.

Our lunch goes on with ease. Leo is quite the talker, compared to me I suppose most people are. I chime in when I can, quite enjoying how often I can get Leo to blush with a few words or a prolonged look. By the time we've finished eating I think I've successfully made him simmer at a light shade of pink permanently. Leo's ready to pay for our meal but I beat him to it, claiming it's payment for our tickets. He agrees, but not before lightly kicking me under the table. Rude.

Now it's time for the zoo, which we're both excited for honestly. Leo just shows it more obviously, what with the way he's practically jumping up and down on the escalator that leads up to the hill the zoo resides on. I watch him with a grin that only grows at his nervous glance before I whisper, "I haven't been to the zoo in forever."

"Me neither. I remember coming with my mom a while ago."

"I came for a trip for biology three years ago, maybe? There was a baby otter at the time. I probably stood there watching him for a good hour."

"Wow, what a creep."

Leo shakes his head before the two of us step off the escalator. The opening of the zoo has a big welcome sign, which Leo shyly requests we get a picture in front of together. Who am I to say no?

Leo has to hold the phone because he's a long limbed freak while I wrap my arm around his waist and pull him close. When he doesn't try to pull away and, instead, wraps his around my neck to rest his head against mine I know that taking the picture is a good idea. Leo is pleased with the result, showing it to me happily to reveal our grins.

There's also a gift shop, which Leo expresses we will visit before we leave. A merry-go-round rests a few steps later. I am not surprised to see Leo's eyes light up. He doesn't have to look at me in order to know what he wants, not that he asks because all he does is grab my hand and drag me over.

"What if I don't want to get on?" I tease.

"Sucks for you."

"Don't be mean, that's my thing."

Leo smiles while handing the operator a dollar for each of us. We step on and enjoy the smooth ride on the horses with slightly chipped paint. This thing has been here for as long as I can remember yet it's still fun to get on. Maybe that has to do with the company.

After our ride it's time to explore the park. While walking I test my limits by brushing my hand against Leo's once, twice, and a third time before finally taking it in my own. For a moment he looks about as if he's inspecting those around us. I'm not sure what gives him the confidence to intertwine his fingers with mine, but I'm happy for it. Who knows if he just feels ok because we're out and about, who's really paying attention? Or perhaps he's testing the waters himself, and I'm ok with that.

There's this ease to the air. This whole week I've been on edge, but finally, I'm able to enjoy myself. I even end up hearing another couple discussing the news, talking about the cops catching "those crazy idiots" and locking them up. Who knows what will happen next, but in this moment, I'm free.

Walking around the zoo with Leo, smiling, laughing, seeing a bunch of adorable animals everywhere, it's damn great. My nerves are finally unwinding allowing my muscles and mind to relax. It's impossible to not be chipper with Leo lightly swinging our hands between us while humming off beat to some pop song that honestly sounds like every

other pop song so I haven't a clue what it could possibly be, but hey, it's cute so I can deal.

The only time our hands aren't together is when Leo is snapping pictures. Sometimes I help, or I'm forced to jump in. I've never been one for pictures but when Leo looks at me with those baby blues I can't help but to agree. This is dangerous. If he finds out how easy it is to talk me into something simply by looking at me then I'm totally screwed.

"What's your favorite animal?" Leo asks.

"Red panda."

"Wow, you didn't hesitate."

"I know what I want."

"I like sloths."

"Sloths?" I ask, that's certainly unexpected. "But they're slow and lazy."

Leo shrugs just as we enter the aquarium. There's a light blue tinge to the entire area. Once in the door the building has a massive open center, showing off the multitude of tanks filled with fish, fish, and more fish, imagine that!

We're walking down the steps to the bottom floor when Leo says, "There's just something about them that makes me want to hold them."

"Ah, kinda like you."

"Huh?" Leo blinks at me in confusion.

"Having something about you that makes others want to hold you, I can get it."

Leo can't seem to respond to that because all he does is sputter and slap his lips shut. See? I'm being gentle, nothing too vulgar right out of the gate. I'll save that for later.

"I figured you'd like...hyenas or something."

"Hyena's?" I eye Leo suspiciously. "I get the feeling that is meant as an insult."

"No! Just cause...they have an almost evil laughter sound, which suits you."

"Are you trying to imply I'm a villain?"

"You sometimes come across as one."

I snicker, again, if only he knew.

"You know, if you keep sweet talking me we're going to have to find some place a bit more private," I say teasingly.

Leo gently pushes me with his arm, but the hold he has on my hand brings me right back over. I chuckle while our shoulders brush, the two of us continuing our path through the aquarium. There are more than just fish, a whole section of reptiles await us where I happily watch a few snakes slither around. Leo doesn't seem as pleased with them, but he's happy about lizards and geckos. Then there's some birds, even jellyfish before we move onto the largest tank that takes up an entire wall.

There are plenty of kids sitting in front of it, pointing, laughing, and asking about the fish within. Leo and I take a seat on one of the benches facing it, both of us leaning our heads back to admire the creatures. There's a few sharks in there that I watch swim about as well as a beautiful arrangement of colors from the fish. They're like a swimming rainbow. My people! Or, well, fish?

Leo's already snapping pictures.

"Thanks for coming with me today," Leo says out of the blue, causing me to turn my gaze to him. He's not looking at me, rather focusing on the pictures.

"I'm the one that suggested it so shouldn't I be saying that?"

"You saw it on my phone."

Ah, so he realized that? I bite my lip when he finally looks back at me with an embarrassed smile. I'm assuming he didn't think of it at first, but seems to have figured it out.

"Either way, I chose the zoo so still my suggestion, besides, I needed to get out," I say.

Leo looks at me curiously and I answer his unspoken question, "I don't really go out with anyone other than Beckett and Misty, if you haven't noticed."

"Oh, I've noticed. Why not?"

"You've hung out with me enough, you should know."

"It's because I've hung out with you enough that I'm asking," Leo says honestly, so honestly that I'm kind of stumped for a moment. He sends me a soft and warm smile.

"You're only saying that because I'm nicer to you than most."

"Why is that?"

"I hate everyone else."

Leo laughs, his shoulders shaking from the sweet sound. Smiling from ear to ear, he says, "I'm flattered."

"You should be. It's an honor."

Shaking his head, Leo holds his phone up to snap some more pictures. He's still beaming while I'm sitting next to him contemplating what to do next. We've both agreed this is a date, it's not like we are unaware of our feelings, yet here I am trying to avoid the question by giving an elusive answer.

Dates are hard, ok.

"That wasn't a completely truthful answer," I say causing Leo to look back at me while lowering his phone into his lap. He cocks a brow, unsure of what I mean. "Hating everyone else, I mean, that is true, but you should know why I'm nicer to you than most."

Leo opens his mouth to reply, but ends up remaining silent. I guess I can't really blame him. There's certainly a familiar feeling here; the one from the steps where it feels like we both know what is about to happen. Except there's no mom here to walk out the door talking about cookies. There are some rowdy kids, but they are way more focused on fish than two boys sitting on a bench, leaning in far closer than any friends would.

There's a brief moment where I stop, once again waiting for some sign from Leo. He's the one that gets to decide. We are in public after all, but all he does is take my hand between us. I think that's answer enough, finally bringing up my hand to wrap around the back of his neck, bringing him down for the kiss that's sweeter than I ever imagined it would be.

Soft, gentle, with an almost shaking undertone coming from Leo. His fingers slip between my own when I nibble on his bottom lip. I feel a chill run down Leo's spine, feel the warmth seeping through my fingers. We pull away, keeping our foreheads pressed together so that I can see how truly blue his eyes are, especially when they are wide open like this. Mine probably aren't that better though.

My heart is beating in my throat. I swear Leo's is too, but it only makes me smile, which in turn makes him smile. It's almost ridiculous the way we both just start chuckling softly with Leo leaning back in for another kiss that lasts a little longer than the first.

However, a young voice suddenly announces to the world, "Daddy, there are boys kissing over there!"

Leo pulls away with eyes the size of saucers while I look for the culprit, finding a boy probably around the age of five pointing at us with a stuffed animal shark. His dad looks over, finding me dropping my hand from Leo's neck, who is now facing away, but the red color has completely taken over his neck, cheeks and ears.

The dad laughs before the mom comes over, looking confused. The kid then expresses the same sentiment to his mother before the dad picks him up and says, "They're probably on a date, Donny, give them some privacy."

"You can't have privacy in public," the kid says confidently.

Ok, but the kid makes sense and I can't help but laugh when the parents walk away doing the same.

"That went well," I say to the still flushing Leo, only now he has his face hidden in his hands.

"How was that well?" He asks, voice muffled.

"I mean, they were cool with it."

Leo slips his hands down to look at me, eyes blinking rapidly. Yes, it's adorable.

With a slow nod, he hums and finally drops his hands to his lap. Doesn't seem like anyone else is watching us so I lean back over to press a chaste kiss to his cheek. Leo smiles, acting like I never even did it then takes my hand while saying, "Come on, it's almost time for the zip line."

With Leo's hand in mine, he drags me off to our next destination. Our hands remain locked the rest of the day while a few more kisses are shared. Our normal date for normal people is somehow extraordinary, and if that isn't the best kind of contradiction then I don't know what else is.

~

FINALLY, SOME PEACE AND A LOVELY DATE CHAPTER! OUR BOYS ARE HAPPY!

Chapter 17

It isn't until Monday morning that it really hits me; it's over.

Mom is shocked to find me watching the news, which I have been doing all weekend to keep up with what has been going on. Clover and Co. are arrested and have even led the cops to some rather unsavory characters. There is no mention or pictures of Kane, which is relieving since the last thing I wanted to do was break his cover. There is a possibility that, in the future, they could get out. I don't know when that will be or if it's even true, but I will make sure to keep up with everything. The last thing I want is to be jumped by these idiots in a dark alley one, five, or ten years down the road.

"I'll see you later," I call to Mom after clicking the TV off. She's getting ready herself, smiling when I walk into the kitchen. She's almost done eating her breakfast when I press a kiss to her cheek. "Love you."

"Love you too. Let me know if you and Leo make any plans after school."

I hum in response and wave goodbye, walking out the door to catch the bus a few minutes later. Leo always goes to school earlier and hits the gym so if we end up working out together then he best decide to change that to the afternoon. There's no way I can get up before 6am. I have a hard enough time as it is!

It's strange how everything's back to normal yet everything feels so different. A part of me says it's paranoia; that this ordeal is going to haunt me for the rest of my life. Honestly, it probably will, what with me having to keep it a secret and all. At the same time, I'm almost grateful for it. Now I know just how serious this power of mine is and what it means to have it. If I'm going to continue going around the city acting as some vigilante then I'll have to be as careful as I can.

Self defense classes are a must at some point. Working out is too. Getting myself a disguise, even if the thought of it makes me snort. What am I going to do? Carry it around in my backpack and hope Beckett's nosey ass doesn't find it? Maybe I'll be like Superman and wear it under my clothes. I have no clue, but the fact remains that I can't let people know who I am. I can't risk it and, whether I end up being like some cheesy hero in comics or not, it's better than being in the open like this.

Then there's the question of what I'm really trying to accomplish. Is this my way of being "special?" Everyone has that wish, to be good at something whether it's as an artist, as a

lover, as a friend, they want something that is for them; strictly for them. Is this mine? And if so, is it a good reason to keep this up? Or am I really just too nice for my own good? I've been asking myself this a lot lately and it never feels like I have the "right" answer.

Maybe that's just it, there is no "right" answer, but rather a multitude of answers that simply make me, *me* . That's the best I can come up with and that's all the thought I'm going to put into it, for now anyways.

Once at my locker, I notice a familiar face heading down the hallway. Leo smiles while walking slowly over before stopping in front of me. I'm not sure what our status is going to be at school. I wouldn't blame him for wanting to keep it quiet, but I hope that changes.

"H-Hey," he says shyly followed by a wave.

"Morning."

"Uh, do you have plans after school?"

I shake my head no in response, shutting my locker door afterwards. "Nope, why?"

"I was just thinking we could...hang out."

"Hang out?" I smile, causing Leo to nervously scratch at his scalp. "Like steal some beer from our parents fridge and sit on some swings like moody teens, hang out?"

Leo rolls his eyes. "No, like...like a date hang out."

Although Leo whispers the last part, I can tell it's yet another one of his "testing the waters." I'm uncertain if others heard, if they had no one stopped to stare or said anything. Still, I give Leo a proud smile and reply, "Sure, we can do that."

"Cool, cool." Feels like Leo said that to me before. "Then, I'll see you later?"

"See you later." I wave goodbye while Leo backs away, giving me a quick wave before running off to meet up with one of his friends.

I think his name's Jimmy or something, they're on the soccer team together. When Leo meets up with him, Jimmy appears to tease him then looks back at me with, I swear, a knowing gaze. All he does is send me a wave before disappearing with Leo down the hall. Something tells me that Jimmy already knows, either because Leo told him or he

figured it out. Either way, he appears ok with it so I let out a relieved sigh...that turns into a groan when I hear the biggest annoyance of my life.

"Do you smell that?" Beckett's head appears over my shoulder while his nostrils flare at his loud sniffing.

"I can't smell anything other than your raunchy breath," I reply while pushing his head away. Beckett yelps and falls back into Misty's outstretched arms. She giggles, her arms wrapping around his waist while he points accusingly at me.

"Smells like romance."

"Looks like romance," Misty giggles. "I see a boyfriend in your future, Micah."

"My future?" I ask with a teasing grin. "Your sight is wrong."

Beckett gasps overdramatically. "A boyfriend...in the present?"

I don't answer, which is answer enough for him. Beckett goes full Super Saiyan, crouching in the hall with his arms up and shouting at the top of his lungs. Both Misty and I stare in horror before a teacher yells at Beckett for making a ruckus. Like the weirdo that he is, he stands up straight and acts like nothing happened, grinning from ear to ear.

"Let us mark this as a blessed day," Beckett says, stepping between Misty and me while throwing his arms over our shoulders. "The demon king has found his husband."

Misty snorts while I roll my eyes.

"No longer must the world live in fear of Micah's future destruction for he can finally get laid and stop being a moody piece of shit."

"Let us mark this blessed day as the day that I finally bury you six feet under," I warn. Immediately, Beckett removes his arm and steps a little closer to Misty.

"My apologies, Your Majesty." Beckett leans over to Misty's ear. "No sex has ensued, I see."

Misty howls, even more so when I actually trip Beckett so he falls flat on his face. The boy shouts and lays on the floor, rolling over to look up at us, his friend and girlfriend that are not helping him. Misty's too busy crying from laughter while I'm glaring at him.

"Well, you are only proving my assumption—"

I raise my foot as a warning that a kick will come next.

"Ok, ok, lesson learned." Beckett hops up then takes us both by the shoulders again to march off to class. "Come along, children! We have classes to sleep through!"

And like that, my school days have returned to what they once were, the usual ones that I love even if I pretend I don't. Somehow I've come to enjoy the ramblings of my teachers for I now know how harsh the real world is. I much rather be sitting in this desk worrying about test scores or what's going to be served for lunch instead of wondering if I'll survive the wrath and stupidity of street hooligans until tomorrow.

Meeting up with Leo after class is like frosting on the cake. Although I can hear Beckett squawking with Misty the moment he sees us together, it doesn't ruin the moment. Leo even sends them a wave, which has Misty waving back and Beckett praising the sky for some reason. I don't bother staying to ask, instead ushering Leo to the bus stop so we can go somewhere, anywhere without Beckett would be great, thanks.

Being able to date, not worrying about those losers tailing me everywhere, it's given me a newfound appreciation for my life and how easy it is, which will likely last a month at the most before I'm complaining about graduation and college. Whatever, the fact remains that I'm happy now, knowing that I have managed to get through this while maintaining who I am. If I had robbed that bank, I don't think I ever would have forgave myself. If I had to continue working with them, I don't think I would have lasted. It simply isn't a life that I could live with.

But the feelings of relief are put on hold after I leave Leo's house later that evening. It's dark when I step into his yard to cross over into my own and I see a familiar, unnerving sight.

A car parked down the street with tinted windows.

My body stiffens when I consider my options until the headlights flash. The window rolls down to allow Kane to briefly poke his head out, gesturing with his hand for me to come on over. I do exactly that, still feeling a bit nervous since I'm wondering why he's here.

Did something happen? They didn't get out of prison already, did they? I recall the news saying they were stuck and not getting out, especially with their rap sheet.

"The triumphant returns," Kane says when I slide into the passenger seat. I send him a nervous smile that has him waving his hand dismissively. "Don't worry, I'm not here bearing bad news."

I guess he really was worth trusting. No one has come to abduct me yet, unless this is the abduction but I doubt it. Once thinking that, I finally realized how tense I was while walking over. My hands relax, allowing the slight sting of the cuts that my nails formed into my palm to be noticed. My shoulders drop and I let out a deep sigh.

"Sorry I haven't come to check on you sooner. I've been...quite busy," Kane says with an apologetic smile.

"I'm sure you have. The news says Clover and his idiots gave up some information on the gangs around town."

"Sure has, can't really get them to shut up to be honest, which is good news for you, not so much for them."

I raise a brow in confusion.

"If any of them get out the last thing they'll want to do is stay in town. They'll be killed in a few days, tops," Kane explains.

Although a part of me wouldn't mind those losers meeting their demise, there's still a part of me that feels bad. A very small part in the back of my mind that shall be ignored because I wanna be an actual jerk for once, please and thank you. Either way, I can't lie that it isn't relieving to hear. I'm safe. We're all safe. It's reaffirmed once again and I'm grateful for it.

"Was it really ok for you to come see me?" I ask. "I appreciate the gesture, but I don't want to blow your cover."

"My cover may not be for much longer if this momentum keeps up. I didn't expect Milton to open his mouth as much as he has. Technically, we have you to thank for that." Kane pats my shoulder proudly, which in turn makes me feel a bit proud of myself. I suppose I should be. I did just manage to throw some criminals in jail that may now lead to a gang being disbanded. Whoa, that's not something one hears everyday, or at all. Someone should write a book about me.

"That's not the only reason I'm here though." Kane leans into the back seat. I watch curiously as he grabs a rolled up black trash bag, sitting it in his lap afterwards. He unrolls it before pulling out a black mask. It almost reminds me of a hockey mask. Oh, so I'm Jason now? Cool.

The mask is all black with two holes for the eyes as well as three vertical lines over the mouth region. The strap is actually a buckle, which I can't help but feel is a good idea.

Kane hands it to me, allowing me to put it on. When I buckle the strap I realize that even if someone got close and tried to pull it off, the buckle would catch. It's definitely something I'd have to get used to. My breath warms up the inside of the mask. It'll probably make me sweat buckets. Not to mention, when I look into the rearview mirror, I want to rip it right back off. I look ridiculous, like some comic book character, but...

"It's better than nothing," Kane says before I can even think of it.

"Thank you," I say while removing the mask, holding it in my lap afterwards. Somehow it feels like it's looking at me yet I almost feel comforted by the thought. "Seriously, thank you for everything. I know the other day kind of messed things up with us."

Kane hums.

"But I would probably be dead or being sent off to commit some worse crime now if you hadn't showed up."

"You're a smart kid, Micah. I'm sure you would have come up with a plan without me." Kane pats my shoulder once more. Kind of feels like a father mentoring his son, which warms me more than I'm willing to admit.

I look to him with a smile that he happily returns.

"Just promise me that I won't regret this. I don't want to hear about your death on the news," Kane says while squeezing my shoulder to show he's serious. "You're invisible, not indestructible."

Trust me, I know. I learned it the hard way. Precautions will be taken, more so now than ever before.

"You won't regret this, I promise," I say more confidently than he probably thought I would.

Kane looks a bit taken aback, but a relieved smile follows to let me know he's happy to hear it. Even if Kane won't be around—I doubt we'll see each other again—it's comforting to know he's out there. Seeing him give me a firm nod builds confidence in my chest.

"Well then, I suppose I won't see you around," he says.

I chuckle. "Suppose not."

"It was a pleasure, Micah."

Kane holds out his hand for me to shake, but when I go to do so, he uses the hold to pull me in for a hug. It's actually quite comforting and I happily return it.

"Thanks again," I say into the embrace, earning myself a few pats on the back. When we pull apart, he playfully pushes me to the door.

"Now get outta here, Kid. It's past your bedtime."

I give him the bird for that one, which he grins at. It isn't until I'm out the door that Kane calls for me again. I lean down to peer into the car. The last thing I hear from Kane is something that sticks with me for some reason.

"Good luck out there, Invisible Boy."

Kane winks before driving away.

Standing on the sidewalk, I watch Kane's car until it disappears around an adjacent street. Looking down, I find the mask in my grasp, holding it up to inspect it better. Once more, the eyes are looking right at me as if challenging me, as if asking me, *what's next?*

I grin.

Invisible Boy. I guess that name isn't so bad.

~

Next chapter is the last, wow, I'm still sad even if I went through the edits D: So, we had the date chapter, had Micah's routine life and his interaction with Kane, how are you guys feeling with the end being so near? Did you like the moment between Micah and Kane? How is he gonna hide the mask? XD

End

Epilogue: Two Years Later

"Let's talk about the Invisible Boy theory."

"Ridiculous, absurd, a bunch of lies from rambling con's trying to get the attention off them and their crimes!" Jenny Brooks says with a shake of her head. The news hosts, Jenny Brooks, Amanda Rodriguez, Bolton Haines, and Dixie Lionel are sitting around a table with their early coffee to discuss another trendy topic of the day.

"Is it though? There have been countless reports matching the same description over the last two to three years," Bolton argues immediately. "So much so that the public has gotten wind of it."

"Not to mention the pictures." Amanda holds up her mug before taking a sip.

"Blurry pictures of what looks to be some kid running around playing dress up," Dixie chimes in. She's always playing the devil's advocate and I thoroughly enjoy hearing them discuss, well, me.

Bolton points to Dixie. "So you're saying you no longer believe he's real?"

"Oh, I do believe we have some vigilante's on the streets. This one's just dressing up and scaring people, making him think he's something he's not."

I purse my lips. The hell is that supposed to mean?

"So, what, he somehow manages to attack these thieves on his own without any weapons?" Amanda asks. "There are accounts of this person taking down five to six men on his own without a single casualty."

"Unconfirmed accounts," Jenny scoffs, shaking her head in disbelief. "Besides, are you trying to imply that his name is literal? He's actually invisible? Give me a break! If he's invisible, how did we get the so called pictures?"

Just then, one of these so-called pictures pops up on screen. Ah, it's a pretty awful picture. I'm all blurry. Ok, so I guess that's a good thing. All they can see is an outline of my body shrouded in black from head to toe. My mask hides my face, but now there's "IB" written on the right cheek in blue, which has become my sort of signature. I don't

leave it around, but people have certainly started using it. I've seen people trying to draw what they think I look like online as well as writing IB on buildings to scare off local criminals. Apparently it's a way to signal I've been around that part of town before. It's like I've got my own bat signal! I really am like Batman, but still gay and still not rich. Thinking about it makes me chuckle.

The picture disappears a moment later.

"And he's clearly wearing a mask!" Jenny also points out. "If he's invisible, why have it? This is a load of hocus pocus made up by scared people. I can't blame them. Crimes are rampant—"

"But dropping fast," Bolton interrupts. "Since the so-called Invisible Boy has come around the streets are getting safer. People have hope. They have someone to look up to."

"Another criminal, you mean?" Dixie chimes in.

Rude. I mean, yes, I kind of am since I have broken into some places to get those criminals and, technically, I am a vigilante, but I'm a good guy! Whatever, I'm so under appreciated.

"Whether people wish to admit it or not, this boy is a criminal and we have no idea if he's done crimes himself. How do we know he isn't using this to cover up his own cri —"

The TV is clicked off causing me to spin around to find Mom standing behind the couch with her hand on her hip. I give her a smile but she's still glaring.

"You're on the news again," she says. Her tone is not pleased.

"Yeah, Mom, I'm a freaking celebrity."

She rolls her eyes. "Micah, I get that you're more confident now but...I'm worried about you. This vigilante stuff it's-it's—"

"Crazy?"

"Yes!"

I walk around the couch to press my hands to Mom's shoulders. They're shivering and her eyes are starting to water. I get it, really I do. She's my mom and she loves me. She

wants me to be safe. This, what I'm doing, it's definitely not safe so I see where she's coming from.

"Mom, this is the right thing to do. If I can help people then why shouldn't I?"

Mom sniffles.

"Can't you see what's happening? People are starting to hope and stand up for themselves. I'm safe. I never go into something unless I know I have the upper hand. I call the cops when it's out of my league. I know when to say no just...trust me. I know what I'm doing."

I try to give her a reassuring smile, but all she does is sigh. She says nothing more on the matter, going on to say, "You're going to be late for class."

I look to the clock. Damn, she's right!

"Shit, love you, see you tonight!" I shout while pressing a chaste kiss to her cheek then bolting out the door to the bus stop. I hop on, the bus driver gives me a smile that I return. Taking a seat, I stare out the window as the world passes me by.

It's been two years since my week of hell. There hasn't been another scare nor a peep from Clover and his goons. Last I heard they were locked up with some fellow pal's. Only a few months ago I heard news that the gang they worked with was brought down, their so-called "Boss" being Gary Leeman. He owns a lot of property around town as well as some fancy oil rigs. It made me think of Kane, but I haven't heard from him. I only hope he made it out safely from his undercover operative.

Since then my life has changed, but only for the better. Going to college, working out regularly, taking all sorts of self defense classes, and beating up criminals throughout the city without anyone having any real proof it's me. Leo is oblivious, although there have been a few times he was suspicious of me. I do come home with bruises, even got a broken rib once that I blamed on a fight with some drunk, but I've managed to keep it under wraps. Life has only been going up for me, after hitting rock bottom the only other way is up so that shouldn't be surprising.

College classes are going well even if I tend to sleep through a few of them. Beckett and Misty are at a different college, which I tell them I'm grateful for. We all know I'm lying. It doesn't feel the same without those knuckleheads around, but I spend a lot of time with them outside of class. However, there's one rather big perk to campus.

"Micah!" Leo calls while waving frantically in the cafeteria. I smile upon seeing the bright blonde that continues waving until I'm walking towards him.

"Hey, Babe," I say and take a seat next to him. He smiles before leaning in for a kiss that deepens immediately, but alas, we are in public.

"Why don't you just start screwing on the table, hot damn," Jimmy says in fake offense causing Leo and I to pull apart. Leo looks away bashfully while I glare at Jimmy.

"You're just jealous because you're single," I say, earning myself a sharp elbow to the gut from Leo.

Jimmy snaps his finger. "Wow, that hurt, but true, true."

My arm slips around Leo's shoulder, pulling him into my side. He doesn't mind, happily leaning into me with a soft smile. Now Jimmy looks even sadder and I relish in it, which he knows judging by his sudden glare.

"I don't know what Leo sees in you," he says.

"I have a huge—"

Leo goes wide-eyed and Jimmy howls so loud that the entire cafeteria stares at him in confusion before I even finish that sentence.

Grinning, I say, "Shoe size."

Leo shakes his head.

"Are you about to say that's not true?" I ask, while swinging my leg up to show my shoe. Jimmy is giggling like a kindergarten and Leo is staring at me in a way that states he's questioning all his life decisions.

"Why am I still with you?" he asks.

"Because I'm hot?"

"No one can deny that Micah has great abs," Jimmy tacks on causing me to raise my hand for a high five, which he happily gives. Leo looks stunned, but I don't see why. He should be used to this. Leo decides the conversation isn't worth his time and returns to his lunch. Jimmy chuckles and does the same. I'm picking food from Leo's plate, which has him trying to take it away. He tells me to get my own, but I pout and continue trying to take his throughout the remaining lunch.

Afterwards we have to part to go to our own classes. Today is a rather late day of classes for both Leo and I so it isn't until seven that I go to pick Leo up from the basketball court. That's where he usually waits for me. His last class ended at six so I find him there with some friends. When he sees me, he comes running over with the usual smile.

"Ready to head home?" He asks then takes my hand in his.

"Was thinking we could stop somewhere to eat first."

"Sure!"

Hand in hand, Leo and I traverse the college campus sidewalks that are growing a little dim. Winter is fast approaching, but the warmth has yet to really leave us. Together we head out into town to find a place to eat, discussing which we'd like to go to when, suddenly, my phone goes off. Leo watches on curiously when I reach to answer it. However, the number flashing on the screen is unfamiliar. Leo seems surprised that I answer, even more so at my hesitancy.

"Hello?"

"Milton got out," Kane says immediately. I know it's him by the sound of his voice even if it's been two long years since I've heard it. My eyes widen.

"What?"

"They let the bastard out for cooperating with the police. From what I hear, he's been going on about killing the Invisible Boy while in prison. He's coming after you, Micah."

I don't even have time to process how Kane got my number or ask how he's doing or anything really. The question of how or if Clover knows which school I'm at doesn't even cross my mind because I know, either way, he'll figure it out. Immediately my senses are on high alert. I start looking all around for any possible sign of him. Leo is eyeing me with concern. The guilt is eating away at me while I turn to inspect every inch, every molecular of our surroundings.

"Listen, you need to leave, pack your bags and go. He could be on his way or even be there now—" Kane's words are lost to me. I'm no longer focusing on anything other than the world around us.

There's a young girl standing on the street corner waiting to cross. An old man is sitting at the bus stop. Two mothers are walking with their young boy between them towards

us. A father is pushing his stroller only a few feet behind us. There's even more, so much more people that my eyes are trying to scan over because the hair on the back of my neck is standing at attention.

"Micah, is something wrong?" Leo asks in concern causing me to turn to him once more. It's when I look his way that I finally see it.

My heart stops at the sight of a hooded man in the parking lot across the street with a gun pointed at Leo like he has no care in the world.

My phone drops when I grab Leo and shove us to the ground moments before a shot is fired. Chaos erupts in the streets with everyone running to find cover after having no idea where the shot came from. I'm grabbing Leo's already shaking hand, dragging him down the street while glancing back only once to see Clover running through traffic like a mad man. The gun is pointed at us. The next bullet hits the corner of the building as we turn it.

Leo's breath is as ragged as my own. We manage to dip down a few streets before Clover can catch up. But somehow his footsteps are ringing in my ears rather than the screams and screeching tires of escaping cars. The smell of burnt rubber lingers in the air. The adrenaline in my veins feels like scorching fire.

He's not far behind us. We've got limited options. After another quick turn, I manage to drag Leo into an empty alley where I pull him into my chest and cover his mouth. We both disappear with Leo going into a pure panic. I can feel his rapid breathing against the palm of my hand. When I disappear my body seems a little transparent to me. I don't know how it is for Leo, but clearly, he knows something is up.

"Shh," I whisper into his ear when Clover runs into the alley not long after with the gun drawn.

There's already sounds of sirens in the distance. Clover doesn't seem to care. Why would he? He has nothing else to lose. Kane said it himself, if Clover got out he was dead so he planned to take me and as many as my loved ones as he could with him. Classic villain tactic. I hate it.

"Come on out," Clover says then fires another shot. Leo jumps in my arms while I'm perfectly still.

"I know you're here." Clover fires at a rustling in the corner, but gets only dust from the bricks. "Damn it, come out, Micah!"

Leo tenses. His quivering gaze glances back to me in questioning. I can't bear to look at him when the guilt grows by astronomical proportions. It has its own gravitational pull by now. Though sirens are growing closer, Clover doesn't mind. Actually, he starts to grin.

"Fine, if ya wish to be that way, maybe I will go pay mommy dearest a visit," Clover hisses before heading down another street with a new destination in mind.

It isn't until I can no longer hear Clover's footsteps slushing through the water from the rainfall the night before that I let Leo go. He stumbles away from me gasping for breath, turning around to stare in disbelief. He can't speak at first, only pointing accusingly at me. I don't give him time to ask though as I dig through my bag to pull out a black hoodie and my mask. That gets a reaction too.

Leo whimpers, actually whimpers and says, "Y-You're joking, fuck, Micah, you're j-joking!"

"Shh," I hiss at him while changing into the hoodie.

"Who was that? He-he knows your mom? We-we—"

"Listen and don't ask any questions," I interrupt the obviously panicking boy. He looks like he wants to argue, but I beat him to it. "Call my mom, Beckett, and Misty, tell them to meet up with you. Don't go anywhere you'd expect, hell, pick a random location but stay there. I'll find you then come get you, got it?"

"Micah, I d-don't...what's going on?"

I shove my belongings into Leo's arms. He barely manages to hold them as I slip the mask on and say, "I'll explain when I get back."

"I'm not leaving you," Leo says sternly, but I grab him by the shirt collar and shove him away. Leo stumbles, barely managing to catch himself on the brick wall.

"It's not just my life on the line here, Leo. Do as I say, please."

I don't bother waiting for a response. There's no time. I vanish causing Leo to jump in surprise. Bolting in the direction Clover left, and once out of view of Leo, I reappear. The best way to get Clover to come out is for him to see me. My only hope is that I don't get shot because of it.

My footsteps echo through the empty streets then alley's while I try to discern where Clover went. He couldn't have gotten that far so I call out to him, "I'm here, jackass!"

The back streets are completely clear. The shots had echoed, people panicked and were hiding indoors. I peer down every street for any sign of the rotten snake. Sirens blare in the background. There's no doubt in my mind that the cops are already at the initial shooting site. They're likely driving along the main roads now and moving through the alley ways.

"Going for Leo and my mom rather than facing me? You're a coward!" I call into the streets. My voice echoes off the walls.

"Says the one that always fights unseen."

I roll to the ground on instinct, good thing too because Clover fires immediately. I'm already hiding behind a dumpster when he fires off another round. If I counted correctly, that's four and he has a six round gun. Two shots left.

"I'm surprised you came back," I say to the man, listening to his footsteps getting closer. His reflection is growing in the water. He's close. Good.

"It doesn't matter where I go. Since I tattled I'm gonna get whacked so I figured I'd take you down before that happens, but when I got out I saw you made quite the name for yourself, Invisible Boy." He snorts. "Wearin' a mask too, coward."

"Says the one with a gun," I mock him.

"Shut your mouth!"

Clover's voice is near. His reflection is close to me in the water. During his next step, I disappear and push myself off the dumpster. Sure enough, he fires another shot in the spot I once was then shouts in annoyance when the gun is taken from his hands. Much like our first battle, I kick the gun away, sending it far into the alley. Self defense classes, good thing I took them. Disarming someone is second nature to me now.

Clover has a knife out. His hand has grabbed mine since I'm so close. He swings the blade down as if to slice through my arm. I'm happy to say that I've put on far more muscle than he has though. I tug him forward causing him to stop in fear of cutting his own arm then I slam my knee into his gut. With the hold on him, I swing his body over my own to drop it against the street.

But Clover is quick to get back up, stabbing out with his knife while shouting, "Fight me face to face!"

Maybe there would be people out there to take that challenge. It's about pride, right? But I've learned pride can be a person's greatest weakness. My loved ones are far more important and I'm not risking them, or myself, because of some dumb thug. I've learned my lesson. Don't get cocky. Don't act smug. Don't think because I'm invisible I can get away with everything. There are consequences to your actions, sometimes severe ones. I'm not here to play games and I won't let him play any with me.

So, once again, I grab Clover by the wrist and disarm him, the knife drops to the ground. He's cursing at me when I twist said arm around his back then slam his body into the brick wall once, twice, and a third time. Finally, he works up the energy to swing himself around and attempt a punch that I easily block. I send my fist into his stomach then his jaw then his face. The man stumbles back, falling into a pile of trash where he belongs with his eyes rolling into the back of his head.

"You know, there will be others like me," he coughs, pushing himself back onto shaking legs. He's wobbling from side to side but still raises his fists. Although I know he can't see me, once again, I feel like he's looking directly at me. "No matter what you do, others will-will learn about you and they'll come a-lookin'. They'll find ya and your loved ones and they'll hurt ya. Today, tomorrow, ten or twenty years from now...but it'll happen, I promise."

My stomach churns at the thought because, in the back of my mind, I know he's right. There are pictures of me online. There's hope. There's belief. I'm not a fictional character to all. One day, someone will probably come looking with the idea of Invisible Boy being real. I can do my best to keep myself unseen, however, there's always a chance others will find out, but...

"I know, it's not going to stop me though," I say before the final hit. Clover drops to the ground, eyes closed and body limp.

There are footsteps in the distance. The cops are upon us. I'm about ready to go look for my phone, or a phone, to get a hold of Leo when I suddenly hear a click. Turning around, I see Clover has crawled over to his gun, which is now pointing at me. My eyes widen.

How can he see me?

His finger is on the trigger when I try to dive out of the way. However, he never manages to pull that trigger for the steps I heard weren't the cops.

With a swift kick, Leo's foot smashes against Clover's face and, let me tell ya, there is no sound more terrifying than the crushing of bones from a soccer player's kick. I wince at the sound that actually echoes along with Clover's extreme cry of anguish, like a dying animal. His gun drops, as does he, with blood trickling out of his nose and mouth like a waterfall. There's no way he's waking up from that.

"Leo, what the hell are you doing here?" I hiss.

It's when I see Leo's reflection in the water that I realize how Clover pinpointed my location. My footsteps, he heard me moving around, saw my footsteps in the water. It was still a guess, but a damn good one. He probably would have hit me had he got that round off.

I reappear. Leo comes running over immediately, wrapping his arms around me like he hasn't seen me in years. I'm a bit surprised. I thought he'd be more upset, but all he does is let out a sigh of relief followed by, "Don't tell me to leave you behind ever again, you asshole."

"Wow, do you kiss your mother with that mouth?"

Leo holds me tighter. As much as I wish to return the gesture, there are footsteps and shouts from the cops. They've definitely found us and I don't really want to be around when they get here. So, I grab Leo by the hand and vanish us both. He pulls away, still appearing shocked and confused. There are a million questions swimming in his blue eyes, all of which I am willing to answer for him even if it terrifies me.

"About that." I pull Leo along through the streets. His grip tightens, a silent way to say that he's listening. My heart is racing and my palms are sweaty. Somehow, this is more nerve wracking than a fight.

This is it. I'm finally going to tell someone the truth, someone I love and trust. Looking back at Leo, all I see is trust in his eyes like, no matter what I say he's going to be right there beside me.

It gives me the confidence to ask, "Do you want to hear the tale about an invisible boy?"

~THE END~

I hope you guys enjoyed, make sure to check out the Q&A and fan art page :) As always, thanks so much for reading! This story means a lot to me because I've always wanted a queer story that isn't just romance. We deserve the same representation straight people always get and it'd be great if there were more

fantasy, super hero, thriller, mystery etc. kind of stories featuring queer individuals instead of just romance and erotica. Hopefully this story counts as more than that for someone, it does to me at least :)

Christmas Special

This is a Christmas Special so it isn't part of the story. This is simply a special for Christmas with some fluff so read if you wish.

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Christmas. It's the time of year that everyone either loves or loves to hate. Personally, and likely contrary to popular belief, I love Christmas for one very obvious reason.

Food.

Yes, Christmas is the best excuse to go all out with food. Having a professional cook as a mom makes Christmas extra special seeing as she comes up with new recipes or perfects old ones so I'm left wondering every year what I'm going to be throwing up the next day. Now I know what you're asking, what's good about this food if it makes you throw up? Simple. It's so good that I stuff my face unnecessarily, get sick and throw up then just stuff my face with leftovers anyways. Probably not the best idea but it's fucking Christmas and if I wanna make myself sick over delicious food then I will.

The one downside, however, is that all this cooking at our house means that I must participate. Mom's excellent cooking genes did not pass along to me. I am a menace in the kitchen, which is why she makes me stick to very simple tasks like putting ingredients in the bowl or putting things in the oven and taking them out when verbally instructed to do so. Then I'm the one putting the cookies or cakes into packages to hand out to neighbors, friends and family.

Yep, I'm the delivery elf during Christmas, ho ho ho mother fucker.

But the amount of people I'm meant to deliver to is dwindling down as Christmas day grows near. It's officially the 21st and my mom and me are meant to leave tomorrow evening to visit family in New York for a few days. That means the last of the batches have to be done today. My arms are stuffed with a portion of this "last batch" when she hands me a few tins of cookies along with a cake and says, "I'm gonna leave for a little while and deliver the rest so, you take that over to the Halton's and you're done."

Her smile states that she saved them for last since we both know I would just sit around with Leo. Nodding, I do as I'm told, trying to pretend like I haven't been waiting for this
~~~~~~~~~~~~

moment all day. Probably doesn't work but who really gives a shit, he's my boyfriend, I should be excited to see him.

Outside the snow is really starting to pile up. Christmas is a few days away so my fingers are crossed the snow lasts until then. Even if I've already shoveled the sidewalk multiple times this month, I don't mind doing it a few more if it means a white Christmas. The wind picks up, causing me to rush to Leo's front porch. The cold doesn't really bother me, but cold with wind sure as hell does.

"Micah, hurry, come on in!" Mrs. Halton says after she answers the door, ushering me in from the cold. The door is shut immediately behind me while I hold out her assortment of goodies.

"Merry Christmas, these are from my mom," I say while Mrs. Halton takes them gleefully.

"Oh, Merry Christmas, sweetie!" Mrs. Halton presses a kiss to my cheek before giggling with excitement. "We've been waiting for these all year! Matilda always makes the best goodies. These won't last the night y'know."

"Trust me, I know."

"Leo's upstairs in his room. Why don't you go up and grab him? We can all have a little snack."

She doesn't have to tell me twice so, quickly, I kick off my shoes and head up the stairs. I can hear Mr. Halton asking downstairs if the trays are from my mom. She really is popular with everyone since, yes, she makes the best junk food. I don't know how I haven't died from a sugar overdose yet but it'll probably happen eventually.

I don't bother knocking on Leo's door, never do and I think he's gotten used to it. So, when the door swings open, Leo doesn't look all that shocked to see me. Sadly, winter takes away the chance of me being greeted with the hot shirtless soccer boy next door. Instead, I'm met with the ball of fluff curled up on his bed beneath piles of blankets although it's really warm in the house. I don't get it but he's adorable peeking his face out of his cocoon of blankets.

"Micah," Leo calls to me with a smile. He scoots over on the bed, looking like a moving ball of lint. "Hey, Merry early Christmas."

"Merry Christmas. Your mom wants us to grab a snack together downstairs. I brought over junk food." I gesture behind me, smirking when Leo starts to pout at the idea of

leaving his personal furnace.

"I don't want to move."

"Get dressed anyways. It's snowing."

"It's December so it should be."

"I want to go outside."

"And play in the snow?" Leo grins from ear to ear. "How...unexpected."

"How? I love throwing snowballs at people. There's nothing more entertaining than watching them dance after the ice goes down their pants."

Leo laughs. "Now it does make sense."

I head back downstairs while Leo changes since he'll just kick me out of the room otherwise. I don't see why, I've already seen everything he has to offer. Still, I won't complain, it's oddly adorable, which shouldn't surprise me. Leo is the definition of adorable.

"Is Leo coming down?" Mrs. Halton asks. She has already got everyone paper plates and put some goodies on three of them. She immediately hands one to me then Mr. Halton, who is already stuffing his face with the first cookie he grabs.

"Yeah, he's changing. I want to go outside."

"Oh yeah, best to go now before we get too much. It's the perfect snow to make a snowman!"

Or have a snowball fight, which is more what I'm aiming for but, knowing Leo, he'll probably want to build a snowman. If Beckett were here, I'd do a snowball fight with or without his permission, likely without since it's better to catch him off his guard.

"It's too cold to go outside," Leo says, appearing in the kitchen with his winter gear on anyways, which is apparently wearing two pairs of pants and two long sleeved shirts plus a jacket, scarf, hat and gloves. Well, the last bits aren't on yet but he's holding them for when we're finished with our snacks.

"It's not that cold out," I argue, which has Leo pursing his lips.

"It's freezing."

"To you."

"To everyone!"

"I don't think it's that cold," Mr. Halton says earning himself a grin from me and a glare from his son. He shrugs and stuffs his face with another cookie.

"You're cold blooded, the cold suits you," Leo says teasingly. Obviously I deny nothing since it's true and shrug in response.

"Micah, are you and your mom visiting your grandparents for Christmas this year again?" Mrs. Halton asks while we all sit in the living room. Some Christmas movie is on in the background while we munch.

"Yeah, we're heading up to New York for a few days." I glance at Leo from the corner of my eye. He's wearing a bit of a pout but says nothing although I know he isn't pleased about me not actually being around on Christmas day.

When I reminded him of the annual tradition he looked completely heart broken, which is understandable since I wanted to spend Christmas with him too but...I only get to see my grandparents a few times a year so I don't want to miss. Leo too, he and his parents are going to visit family an hour or so away. The holidays always make it difficult.

"Well, maybe if Leo asks in advance he can find a way to go to New York with you next year so he doesn't mope around the house while you're away," Mr. Halton teases while staring at his son that goes wide-eyed at being called out. I snort while Mrs. Halton holds her hand over her mouth to keep back a giggle.

"I-I-I'm not...I'm n-not gonna mope!" Leo argues but we all know he's full of shit. "I just...this is...it's Christmas."

"He won't be gone long and you can celebrate Christmas together on any day. Spending time with family is important too, next time, you'll just have to try and plan ahead."

I nod in agreement, earning me an eye roll from Leo. He sinks into the couch while finishing his last cookie but apparently not the one before it. Now his cheeks are all puffed out like a very angry chipmunk that has all of us chuckling. We finish our snacks not long afterwards.

"I'm not gonna mope, stupid dad and his stupid accusations...it's Christmas, I'm allowed to be bothered," Leo is grumbling softly to himself while kicking the snow from the edge

of the porch steps. He hasn't realized that I'm following behind him, stepping out of the house so I can hear his soft complaints.

When the door clicks shut behind me, Leo turns around. He's still pouting and immediately turns away before going down the first few steps. I stop him before he reaches the bottom, tapping his shoulder to get his attention so he turns to face me. It's a bit odd, this angle, since Leo is now shorter than me thanks to him standing on the last step and me at the top. Not that I'm complaining, nothing wrong with having those big blue eyes looking up at me.

"What?" Leo asks. His nose and cheeks are already red from the cold. He brings up his hands to rub his face in hopes to warm it. "Let's hurry this up. I'm gonna freeze to death."

Leo stares at me in confusion when I reach out to grab his hands. I bring them up to my lips where I blow warm air against his gloves that immediately heat up. I place his hands back on his face and hold mine there on top of them.

Then, with a soft smile, I lean down to press my lips to his. Again, another odd angle since I normally have to push onto my tip toes. I quite like this height advantage, angling Leo's head just right so that our lips can press together in a smooth kiss that heats up the moment I nibble at his lips, which part immediately. A soft moan rumbles in Leo's throat when my tongue brushes over the roof of his mouth, the kiss deepening until my lungs scream for air.

After pulling away, I think it's safe to say it's no longer the cold that is making Leo's cheeks red.

"Still cold?" I ask.

Leo averts his gaze. Our fingers are playfully hitting against one another while still on his ever warming cheeks. Quietly, Leo whispers, "Still very cold."

"I can fix that."

This time, Leo is the one that leans up, catching my lips with his...except I think I've tainted this child. Not even a second into the kiss do I feel Leo pull his hands away before a cold pile of mush is thrown against my face. I hiss when the ice slips down my shirt and Leo is cackling evilly, already hopping off the steps to run into the yard.

Ok. I see how it is.

I'm off the steps and building a snowball in a second. Leo shouts when he's suddenly being attacked by one snowball after the other. He quickly tries to hide behind one of the inflatable decorations in his yard but I'm running around it to throw a snowball at his face. Our shouts and laughter echo over the cold night air until Leo concedes defeat and insists we work on a snowman instead.

"You started the fight," I point out afterwards when Leo is shivering and hopping from one foot to the next.

"I couldn't resist. It was perfect."

"I feel like I've tainted you."

"You definitely have," Leo laughs but presses a kiss to my cheek anyways. Ok, I'll forgive him for starting the snowball fight since he's cute.

Damn, I don't think that should be a reason to forgive him but, I swear, that is always the reason I forgive him. I'm doomed.

Leo definitely prefers building the snowman. He's piling up the snow to build one massive base while I'm working on the next. The two of us carefully lift it then Leo works on the head, shaping it to the best we can do with gloved but still cold hands. There is a brief moment we run inside to grab a scarf and some liquorice candy since we don't have anything else for the eyes and mouth. Sadly, there's no carrot so this loser is gonna have liquorice nose too.

"He looks like he's seen some shit and wants to die," I comment after Leo has given the snowman twigs for arms and liquorice for every facial feature he needed.

"He does not."

"Seriously, his eyes look dead."

"Of course they do, he's not alive."

"Frosty would be offended."

Leo laughs. His entire body shivers before he crosses his arms. Much like myself, his face is red from the cold and nose runny but he's still standing here staring at our poor excuse of a snowman. I'm not sure why he hasn't asked to go back inside again but I don't bother bringing it up. Instead, I walk behind him causing Leo to glance at me over his shoulder. His lips pull into a smile when I wrap my arms around his waist and shove

my hands into his jacket pockets. Since he's taller, I barely manage to see over his shoulders but I don't mind, neither does he. We stand there a while with Leo leaning back against me. I press my forehead into his shoulder and just bask in standing there with him in the falling snow. Somehow, it doesn't feel all that cold anymore.

"I'm not mad or anything about you going to visit your family during the holidays...I-I hope I didn't come across like I was," Leo suddenly says out of the blue causing me to peer up at him.

"I never even thought that you were."

"Really?"

I hum and nod. "I'm disappointed about not seeing you on Christmas either but, we didn't really think about it in time. Next year, maybe we can try to make plans for me to go to your families or mine. I don't know, just, we're together now so that's cool, right?"

"Freezing cool," Leo says while I shake my head at his lame excuse of a joke.

"So, while we've still got the time, is there anything you want to do together that we might have done on Christmas?"

Leo perks up at the question. "Um...like what?"

"Kissing under the mistletoe or warming ourselves up-"

"By the fire?"

"No, by having sex."

Leo looks away, acting like he's angry with me but I can see the amusement on his face.

"Sorry, I'll keep it PG. How about wearing matching ugly Christmas sweaters?"

"Is that what you want to do?" Leo laughs, turning his head enough to face me again. His neck has to be hurting by now. "Because you brought it up first."

"I'm trying to think of something cheesy and disgusting that you would like."

Leo snorts. "Cheesy and disgusting, sure."

"You didn't answer the question."

"I don't know. I guess, obviously, there's exchanging gifts. Um...drinking hot chocolate together, listening to bad Christmas songs, cuddling and watching Christmas movies, stuff like that."

"Which we can do now, before I leave."

Leo nods. He knows this, so do I. Maybe we just needed to talk about it out loud.

"How about you go get my present and come over my house so I can give you yours?" I request causing Leo to raise a curious brow.

"Why your house?" He asks and blushes immediately at my response.

"Because my mom's not home."

Leo brings his hands up to his face. I snicker when he pulls away, shaking his head as he does. It's suddenly freezing now that Leo is out of my arms. He hasn't answered yet, continues to keep his back to me before suddenly spinning around. I'm a bit shocked when he presses a chaste kiss to my lips and says, "I'll be over in a minute."

Before I can really tease him about that fucking adorable reaction, Leo runs up the porch steps. However, before he can make it inside I call for him, "Leo!"

He looks back at me curiously and smiles upon seeing my own.

"In all seriousness, we'll make tonight our own special Christmas because it doesn't really matter what day it is, as long as we're together, right?"

Leo bites his lip, hesitating to answer before giving an eager nod followed by a quiet, "Yeah...as long as we're together."

With that, Leo heads inside to retrieve my gift but, honestly, having him around for Christmas is already gift enough for me.

~

Fluff. Christmas fluff. I hope you liked it!

Q&A

Are you going to make more books that coincide with this one?

Nope.

Will there be a sequel?

Also nope.

How did Micah's family get their powers?

Ah, this was explained in the first chapter. It's passed down and, just like in TNSSH, mutations will eventually happen to everyone so Micah's family just evolved quicker than everyone else. Since they didn't exactly know about others they were unaware of what it was so no one ever said anything to anyone else.

Will he meet other eh... gifted people?

Eventually, yes. In my mind Micah is like the very starting point of mutants becoming known. While more info will spread online and people will start questioning if there are others around the world, Micah will never directly meet or get involved until later in life.

Will he work with the police?

Technically, he kinda does? He calls them up if something is out of his hands but anonymously. However, he'll never "officially" go into the police and make himself known.

Will Micah and Kane keep in touch?

Not now? Kane was undercover, so best if they don't but I think they'd find each other later in life, say Micah's thirties or so.

What will be the largest thing he will ever make invisible?

A two story house, like typical sized but only because it's stationery. Smaller vehicles he will eventually be capable of turning invisible while moving but not, say, a large truck.

Will Leo be a soccer pro?

Definitely! AND HE WILL BE AMAZING!

To Micah, have you considered telling Beckett and Misty about your powers?

As much as I say I want to kill my friends I don't actually mean it nor do I want to put them in danger so, no, I don't consider telling them.

Could Micah's mom have phased through a bullet?

As some people tried to point it, there is a possibility she could have. However, Micah has practiced and trained to use his abilities thus learning what he can and can't do. In fact, he's still learning, and this is stressed on multiple occasions, so *hint hint* to some issues concerning mutations, whereas his mom is adamant about not using hers. In my universe, no, she could not phase through a bullet at this time, because in this version of mutations, you have to train up and actually use your abilities frequently to get a firm understanding and control over them. In other words, had Micah told her the truth and she attempted to phase through a bullet, she would have died. Some said she could phase through a knife, which she could IF she *KNEW* it was coming. If someone walked up behind her when she doesn't know they are there, she'd be dead. Also, Micah will not risk the lives of his loved ones on a chance. This is both a good and bad character trait as he could have asked for help, but chose putting his life in danger rather than endangering others.

Then will other people ever know i.e. Beckett and Misty?

Yes, but only after mutants are actually making themselves known. I do think they will suspect something is going on at some point since there are times Micah is seriously injured. However, the most people that will know at any given time are Leo, Beckett, Misty and, obviously, Micah's mom. Since he is at the beginning stage of mutants they aren't as accepted as they are in TNSSH.

Will he/they ever move?

Like out of their parents house? xD I sure hope so! But, yeah, they'd move based on whatever soccer team Leo will join.

How old is Kane?

Honestly, didn't have a lot of info for Invisible Boy but I always imagined Kane to be in his mid to late thirties.

How would the end of the relationship of the two look like?

This is probably the couple I can see spending their lives together forever without any sort of disruption so...it'll never end!

What are their Hogwart Houses?

Micah is definitely a Slytherin and Leo is a Hufflepuff. Beckett and Misty are Gryffindors.

How long has Micah been friends with Misty and Beckett?

Micah has been friends with Beckett since elementary school but he hasn't known Misty as long, a little over a year. He only got to know her because Beckett liked her.

When did Leo first develop feelings for Micah?

Ever since Micah came out. At first, he just looked up to him but admiration turned to affection real quick.

What was Leo's first impression of Micah?

Nothing special? I'd say he just saw him as "the quiet boy next door."

What did Leo think about the kiss and date?

He was definitely really nervous but ultimately happy that Micah had the guts to really initiate it. At that point he was too nervous to do it himself so he's grateful Micah was there to give him a push.

What quality of Micah does Leo like the best?

Bravery and honesty. Leo thinks Micah is the bravest and coolest guy there is, even before he knows about his powers.

To Leo: On a 1-10 scale, how much do you like Micah romantically?? ;3

Isn't that obvious? 100.

To Leo: Did you ever think Micah would reciprocate your feelings?

Hahahahahahaha, no.

To Leo: What did you think happened at first when Micah met up with you looking disheveled?

I thought he was too blunt with someone so they beat him up for it. Honesty is good but sometimes Micah is a little too honest.

To Micah: Which parent do you think gave you this gene for invisibility?

I don't think, I know it was my mom. It was passed down in her family.

That's all for the questions so, as per usual, onto my cheesy thanks and shameless self advertising!

Again, thanks so much everyone for sticking around. When I started Wattpad I kept more traditional stories up such as teenage romances with nothing really supernatural about them. However, my fantasy and hero stories have been doing exceptionally well and that relieves me more than I can explain. Sometimes I feel like LGBTQ+ novels are only counted as "good" if they are purely sexual so I'm very happy that stories like IB, TNSSH and HWWBK have been doing well. It's giving me back hope in humanity lol And I'm grateful so many of you are sticking with me, even trying out stories that aren't your cup of tea then coming to love it. Thanks so much for all the love and support! I promise to keep doing my best and giving you guys something to read that will, hopefully, bring some light in your day ^_^

Onto the advertising lol

Ongoing Free to Read Novel:

The Secrets of Lore Seymour

Completed Free to Read Novels:

He Who Will Be King
Invisible Boy
What Makes a Monster
Dear Caleb
Fools in Love
-K
14 Days
The Lonely Ones

Completed Paid Novels Available on Tapas:

Speak the Truth
Riddle Me This
Whisper Woods
The Not So Super Hero
The Antidote to Doubt
Save the Demon King
Reborn as the Villain's Lackey

Ongoing Comic Available on Tapas:

Speak the Truth (adapted from the novel)

Completed Comic Available on Tapas:

Love Algorithm

Fan Art

Hello my lovelies! Welcome to the fan art page~ Check out the artists, give them some love! And, of course, thanks to anyone who makes fan art or anything related to my stories. I cannot express how much I appreciate it!

Micah by Nissa01 (https://www.instagram.com/deez_mr_galid/) I cannot express how much I love this, omfg <3